

# EEVADHARA

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SAINTHOOD

HOLY PEOPLE OF GOD: OUR IMAGE OF SAINTHOOD

*John B. Chethimattam*

BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE MAN OF GOD

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SRI NARAYANA GURU AND HIS ADVAITIC VISION

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**JEEVADHARA**

**The Meeting of Religions**

**SAINTHOOD  
IN AN INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE**

Editor:

**JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM**

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## Editorial

On February 8, 1986 Kuriakos Elias Chavara and Sister Alphonsa were officially declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II at Kottayam. He called it an extraordinary day in the history of the Church universal, the church in India and "in the history of the pastoral ministry of the Bishop of Rome", because "it is the first time that he has had the joy of raising to the glory of the altar a son and a daughter of the church in India, in their native land". India is titled *ārṣabhbārata*, the land of sages because its religious wealth is first and foremost its holy men and women, who much more than the institutions of religion like sacred edifices and sacred writings influenced and shaped the life of the people. This emphasis on holy persons rather than on institutions has given India's culture a great profundity since it is deeply religious giving priority to the ultimate concerns of man than to mere temporal needs.

Christianity is often accused of an exaggerated emphasis on institutions so much so that it is even nicknamed churchianity. As the establishment founded by Christ with an unified authority and effective means for the sanctification of all human beings, tracing its faith and tradition to the preaching of the Apostles, the immediate disciples of Christ, it too often projected the image of an institute of salvation, a spiritual super-market that provided supernatural goods to all who cared to come and receive them. But this image is far from true. Christ came as the leader of a new humanity, the restored *Kahal Yahweh*, the commu-

nity of persons called together by the Lord. What he established was a new covenant, a new treaty with Yahweh on one side and free human persons on the other. The church is the fellowship of the saints. The bishops and priests are persons chosen and appointed to serve and lead that community. It is not any exclusive club either, but the People of God open to all the people God loves and that means every human being. The unity it preaches is not exclusivist, in the sense of an externally imposed structure binding together all card-carrying Catholics alone. It is an all inclusive unity, one God the Creator and Father of all, one Lord the Saviour who makes a divided humanity one again, and one faith that calls all to fellowship in experience. The saints, the holy persons who by their life and example emerged as models for all, most appropriately typify this Church: it is the church of the saints.

The raising of Blessed Chavara Kuriakos Elias and Alphonsa to the honours of the altar is of particular significance to the Church in India and especially the Kerala Church. The Church in India has amply compensated the fewness of its members by the multiplicity and virulence of its institutions, classes and factions. The Kerala Church seems to have substituted in the place of a live concern for the growth of human persons an exaggerated preoccupation with rites and traditions, rights and privileges, security, preservation and expansion of institutions almost as ends in themselves. In sharp contrast to this mad traditionalism stand the personalities of Blessed Father Kuriakos and Sister Alphonsa both of whom dedicated their lives to the service of the living church. Father Kuriakos found himself in a situation where he had either to follow blindly the regulations and traditions of the Latin church or to go along with the majority of Syro-Malabar clergy who wanted complete conformity with the traditions of the Chaldean church. But he was a man of the future, a pioneer. Without having any previous model to copy from or any past establish-

ments to protect and preserve he boldly undertook new ventures for the all round development of the people. As Pope John Paul II said in the Beatification homily, "Under his leadership or inspiration, a good number of apostolic initiatives were undertaken: the education and formation of the clergy, the introduction of annual retreats, a publishing house for Catholic works, a house to care for the destitute and dying, schools for general education and programmes for the training of catechumens. He contributed to the Syro-Malabar liturgy and spread devotion to the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Family. In particular, he dedicated himself to encouraging and counselling Christian families, convinced as he was of the fundamental role of the family in the life of society and the Church." Blessed Sister Alphonsa also was a courageous soul who as the Pope says "would gladly have served the Lord with similar apostolic projects". But hers was the path of suffering and prayer. She undertook the apostolate of hidden life and silent suffering claiming for herself a piece of Christ's Cross for the salvation of her fellow human beings. "Sister Alphonsa knew that by her sufferings she shared in the Church's apostolate; she found joy in them by offering them all to Christ." (*Ibid*)

*Jeevadhara* is dedicating this issue to a study of saintly persons from an interreligious perspective. Though all religions in some manner or other venerate saints, the image of sainthood greatly differs from one tradition to another. My own article makes a brief study of them and their complementarity. Father Antony Edanad explores the image of the man of God in the Bible. Father Kuriakose Elias Vadaketh presents a study on the development of the saintly personality of Blessed Kuriakos Elias Chavara as he grew in knowledge and wisdom in a way parallel to the evolution of the Syro-Malabar ecclesial community in the last century. Domitian Manickathan gives a short description

of the literary contributions of Blessed Kuriakos Chavara, neatly dividing them under two heads, historical and literary. Eliseus draws a picture of the spiritual personality of Blessed Alphonsa. From the interreligious field we have two contributions: M. R. Gopalakrishnan Nair gives a short synthesis of the spiritual message of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and R. Karunakaran, head of the Kerala University's Advanced Centre for the Study of Vedanta describes the life and message of Sri Narayana Guru. This we hope will serve to place the Catholic theological perspectives of holiness in interreligious and Biblical context.

John B. Chethimattam

## Holy People of God: Our Image of Sainthood

The Church has always venerated the apostles, martyrs, Blessed Virgin Mary and the angels with special devotion and devoutly implored the aid of their intercession. As Vatican Council II in its document on the Church states, "to these were soon added those who had imitated Christ's virginity and poverty more exactly, and finally others whom the outstanding practice of the Christian virtues and the divine charisms recommended to the pious devotion and imitation of the faithful." (*L.G.* 50) The Council enumerates the reasons for venerating these holy persons who closely followed Christ: By their example they inspire us on our way to the city that is to come, show us the safe path to follow in life; vividly manifest to men God's transforming presence in the world. We see in them the sign of God's kingdom since through them God speak to us. Above all our companionship with the saints shows forth the intimacy of members in the mystical Body of Christ. In the Holy Eucharist the worshipping people are united with the Church in heaven (*Ibid*). For, "in the earthly liturgy, by way of foretaste, we share in that heavenly liturgy... we sing a hymn to the Lord's glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army." (*S.C.* 8) In the veneration of the holy persons there is something basically common in all religions and also something specifically particular to the different traditions. Some consider the saint as a hero, others as a solitary and isolated individual who realizes in himself the common destiny of humanity and yet others think of him as the focal point of the human community.

### Saints as Heroes

One of the basic traits of a man of God is that of a spiritual giant who stands out in the midst of a crowd of ordinary people. This characterisation of the saint as a hero owes its origin to the Greek world. The people who settled down in the Greek mainland between 3000 and 1000 B.C. had to put up a struggle to make out a living in the cramped geographical situation. The Greek concept of virtue or *arete* was basically valour or excellence, the courage to stand up against adverse circumstances. Even the ontological concept of 'being' according to Plato's *Sophist* indicated "something so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected" (*The Sophist* 247 d-e). One had to establish oneself in view of one's *moira* or destiny, which originally meant the part or portion of land allotted to each one, emphasizing the limitations or restrictions imposed, and *dike* or justice was "due share" (Jaeger. *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture* vol.1, Oxford Univ. Press, 1965, pp. 60-62). People were regulated by, *nomos*, or law, the original meaning of which was the positive task each one had to fulfil within one's limits. Valour was conceived very much as brute force as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odessey* and other Greeks classics testify: Achilles, Menelaus, Diomedes, the Ajaxes, Odysseus, Hector and others are celebrated for their physical strength and courage. They demonstrate a strength and excellence of the human body other than sexual as an expression of authentic humanity. Still, valour itself was considered a gift of the gods, and to obey gods was better, since "the gods hear all the prayers of him who heeds them". When material conditions improved, city states ruled by kings emerged and the emphasis shifted from brute force to *themis*, right established by judicial decision, and from physical valour to moral virtue. Socrates declares in his *Apology* before the Athenian court: "A man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong — acting the part of a good man or of a bad." In the *Gorgias* of Plato, Socrates again states that

for a truly just man it is far better to suffer injustice than to inflict injustice on others (*Gorgias* 525b- 527). Regarding the death of Socrates, who is presented as a moral hero, Plato says through the mouth of Phaedo: "He died so fearlessly, and his words and bearing were so noble and gracious, that to me he appeared blessed. I thought that in going to the other world he could not be without a divine call, and that he would be happy, if any man ever was, when he arrived there." (p.68)

Socrates presented the ideal picture of the moral hero and saint in the Greek perspective. The ideal of this excellence is realized in the immortal vision of the supreme beauty, "a nature which without diminution and without increase or any change is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things." The real moral hero is one who ascending from various levels of finite beauty under the influence of love begins to perceive that eternal beauty (*Synopsium* p. 218). But as long as life like the busts of Silenus or Marsyas the Satyr and like Socrates himself may appear externally ugly, but internally filled with divine gifts and noble influence for the transformation of people's lives. These men of vision must have also practical sense to realize in actual life the ideals they contemplate.

Western Christian ideal of sainthood has placed the emphasis on this Greek image of the individual hero who stands head and shoulders above ordinary people presenting a model for all to follow and leadership and efficiency to organize and unify the community. The Blessed Virgin Mary who treasured the mysteries of Christ in her heart and rendered her maternal help to the infant Church, and the Apostles who were witnesses of the Christ-event and martyrs for the Gospel were such heroes. St. Stephen who courageously bore witness to Christ in the teeth of Jewish opposition, and was stoned to death is hailed as the proto-martyr and ideal saint. So were Lawrence, Sebastian, Agnes, Agatha and other saints of the early Church who professed their faith fearlessly and suffered persecution

under the powers of the Roman empire. The Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries saw the emergence of another type of heroes, the Doctors of the Church, who stood up for orthodoxy and integrity of faith when Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism struck like tidal waves the faith of the common man. Athanasius, Flavian, Cyril, Basil, Augustine, Gregory of Naziansus, Gregory of Nyssa and a host of others came out as exponents of correct thinking in the light of faith.

In later centuries the image of the saint became more complex since the field of spiritual heroism is less clearly marked than in the case of martyrdom in defense of faith or of defense of orthodoxy against heresy. Sts. Benedict, Bernard of Clairveance, Francis of Assissi, Dominic, Antony of Paduva and others acclaimed as saints since by the examples of their personal lives and their teaching they upheld the Christian values of poverty, chastity, self-abnegation and other virtues against the worldly spirit, ambition and strife that seemed to characterise the life of their fellowmen. Here again the image of the hero stands out. Every saint is pointed out as a hero to be looked up to, admired and imitated. To take a few examples at random from recent years this heroism remains the dominant factor looked for by the Church authorities in canonizing and beatifying individuals. Referring to St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Montreal, whom Pope John Paul II canonized on October 31, 1982, the Pope says: "Look at the zeal, the realism, the audacious love of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys. Think of the value she attached to the soul of every little girl; be she a colonial or an Indian, she was like a drop of the blood of Jesus Christ; consider her devotion and her capability as a teacher, opening schools where they were needed near the families and working with them... Admire her pastoral imagination and tenacity in preparing young men and women to establish stable homes." (Talk on Sept. 11, 1984 p. 150) Similarly on May 29, 1984 speaking about Blessed Ursula Ledochowska, foundress of the Con-

gregation of the Ursuline sisters, the Pope said: "The life of Blessed Ursula is so rich in events, teachings and works as to constitute in itself an inspiring model for whoever stops to consider one or other of its aspects. How could we not be struck particularly by the way in which she could see in every situation the signs of the times in order to serve God and man." Recent Roman documents in connection with the beatification of Blessed Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Blessed Alphonsa as well as the Papal homily about them present them as outstanding heroes evoking our admiration, models for imitation, and powerful mediators to gain divine favours for us. In this respect the miraculous favours gained through the holy people are considered sign of divine approval on their sanctity and necessary conditions for their beatification and canonization.

### Godmen as People of Insight

Indian view of saints did not place the emphasis on their uniqueness as exceptional heroes towering above common humanity, but rather as typical expressions of our transcendental and sublime reality, available to every man to realize in life. Thus Siddhartha Gautama, named Śakyamuni or sage of the Śākyā clan, became Buddha when he attained illumination under the Bodhi tree about the meaning of life and reality. Everyone is called upon to attain buddhahood. Similarly Mahavira is the twentyfourth Tirthamkara, one who realized the fullness of knowledge and power available to every human being in the depth of his personality when the external limitations imposed by human greed, selfishness and other restricting conditions are removed.

The idea stressed in this perspective is that there is only one holiness, and it is transcendent, infinite and incomprehensible. The holiness, that can be attained by individual human beings is the realization their rootedness in that one Holy. It can in no way be conceived in terms of our daily experiences of heroism, goodness and moral rectitude how exceptional so ever it be, neither through generalizations from it nor by additions. No transition is possible from the finite to the Infinite since the Infinite is

not anything additional to the finite.

The real godman is one "who has his firmly founded wisdom, whose being is steadfast in the one Self". This state a man attains when he has put away all the desires of his mind, and when the self is content and at peace with the self. Unpleasant things do not perturb him, nor pleasures beguile him. Passion, fear and rage have left him. Without affection on any side he draws away the senses from their objects and his intelligence is firmly set in wisdom. Having brought all senses under control he remains firm in yoga, intent on the divine Lord. What is night for all beings is the time of waking for the man of true wisdom, and when they are awake it is night for the seer. This is the divine state. Having attained thereto one is not again confused, fixed in that state at the end one attains the bliss of God (*The Bhagavad Gita II 55-72*). The real saint in this perspective is one who sees the divine Self as his authentic reality and consider the world of things really unreal. So a holy man is a person of true discernment, distinguishes what is eternal from the transitory, has no passion for fruits and results neither in this life nor in the next, organizes his relationships with persons and things in a spirit of self-discipline, compassion, detachment and equanimity.

Holiness for man is closeness to, intimacy with and realization of the one Source of all holiness, the transcendent and at the same immanent Mystery. The really Holy is One-without-a-second and so any finite being can realise holiness only by discovering its true reality in the bosom of that Infinite. Knowing everything the really holyman sits quiet and humble as if he were ignorant but he is swift as wind to comprehend all things in the unity of the One. In the light of the all embracing reality of the Infinite, the role of the finite individual is to manifest and make present the timeless and quantityless Reality in space and time.

The function and role of the saint is not that of an intercessor or mediator between the Transcendent and the ordinary levels of existence as for the Greeks. It is rather to remind each and every one of his inherent greatness.

The saint does not obtain any special favours for us from above through his miraculous powers. He only helps others attain by themselves the same experience as he has attained. Miraculous powers he may have. But they indicate only an inferior level of attainment to demonstrate the subservience of the bodily and temporal to the power of the spirit, and not the saint's intercessory influence with God. So such preoccupation with miraculous powers and gifts is considered rather an obstacle than a help for the attainment of final realization.

Still the godman is not a passive and inactive contemplator of the divine. Once the supremacy of the Spirit is established and the finite self's identity with it is realized action becomes free of affliction. This is the basis of detached action. One of the fundamental insights of the Upanishads, Samkhya and Yoga is that the source and basis of action is thought. If thought identifies oneself with the doer of actions such action leads to further bondage. But if thought is purified and it realizes that oneself is not doer, action ceases to be a source of bondage. As Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in the Gita: "He who sees his self not to be the doer, he sees indeed" (Gita XIII, 29). The suppression of mental activity advocated by the Yogasutras is aimed at removing the separation between the knower, knowing and known on the spiritual plane, so that placing oneself on the level of the pure spirit identifying all the three one can look at activities without getting contaminated by them. In fact for the *Lankavatara Sutra* of the Buddhists the essence of liberation is realizing that the whole phenomenal world is an elaboration of the mind. "All this is mind only. The twofold mind generates the existence of the perceiver and perceived. But self and that which belongs to it are never known (III, 121).

According to the Gita the ideal of action is ritual worship. There are two basic spiritual orientations for man, "for men of reason, the way of knowledge, for men of discipline the way of cultic action" (Gita III, 3). Renunciation and withdrawal from work are not enough. The law

of existence is action. The superior way of approach to action is to restrain the senses and engage in the discipline of work with all one's powers without being anxious about results. Even though the world is enslaved by actions sacrifice and ritual typify a mode of action free from such bondage. Just as according to mythology, Prajapati, the Creator, is said to have created the world with sacrifice. Ritual sacrifice signifies the establishment of a certain fellowship among gods and human beings (*Gita* III, 10-15). According to Yogavasishta activity presents a field where thoughts are creatively expressed:

"Whatever thought is held with certainty,  
that very thing comes into existence  
just as a fire-ball ignites  
from contact with fire." (IV, 20, 2)

The world is looked upon as an extension of the mind, a manifestation of the person, who can express himself in the beauty and variety of material things (*Ibid* III, 91, 4). The emergence of this world is no more than thoughts manifesting themselves (III, 84, 30). So the holy man is one who realizes his authenticity in the bosom of the divinity and expresses that divine self-orientation in the things of this world through creative activity. The world has no reality of its own except as the expression and manifestation of the spirit.

Since the spirit has to express its thoughts in actions the Indian saint is also a man of strenuous efforts in order to transform this alien world into an extension of the spirit. Mahabharata and Ramayana are mythological narratives that bring out the need for much transformative effort. Savitri who through her penance and shrewd wisdom achieves the release of her husband Satyavat from the clutches of Yama, the Pandavas who fight against the Kauravas for their rights and Rama who liberates Sita from the thraldom of Ravana are all illustrations that the authenticity of human life can be realized only through strenuous efforts against heavy odds:

"The strict always abide by the law

The strict do not tremble, nor do they despair,  
.....

With their truth do the strict give lead to the sun  
With their penance the strict uphold the earth."

(*Mahabharata III, The book of the Forest*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1975, p. 772)

The holymen are not isolated heroes, but rather object lessons of what should happen in every human life, "the course of future and past" (*Ibid*).

### The saint as the man of the hour

The Hebrew and the Oriental Christian emphasis in the holy people is their individual personalities, function and message in the context of history. The leaders of Jewish history Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the judges and the prophets were people specially chosen by God to play a decisive role in the salvation history of humanity. Though in the earlier stages their personal holiness is not very much emphasized, soon in the context of the importance of the inner conversion of man to observe the law of the Lord, inner sanctity became the central factor in the mission and message of the holy persons chosen by God. The logic of faith such as we have it in the Bible is that of an experience of God in human life and of his plunging into the opacity of human history, God has joined us in the heart of our life, in our concrete human situation, in the midst of the stirrings of our human heart. The core of salvation history is the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ at a particular point in human history, "sub Pontio Pilato". It is in the same historical context that saints of Christ properly belong. They manifest the suffering and triumph of Christ at a particular moment in the history as representatives of God's people gathered around the Risen Lord. They are not isolated individuals seeking their own liberation, nor heroes standing apart from others. Their principal mission is to provide leadership to the pilgrim people of God in presenting an object lesson to the newness brought about by the resurrection of Christ. They emphasize the stability and

incorruptibility as the ideal of human perfection in contrast to the corruption that is the source of death inherent to this world. Christ the true and complete man was never submitted to instability not to natural death, which is tied to sin. The saints are paragons of stability and incorruptibility even in their worldly existence. This is in opposition to the Greek contrast between the sensible and intelligible worlds. As Sahadona a Syrian writer of the 5th century states: "times and places do not make any obstacle to life of a wise soul perfected and exercised in the fear of God, because it does not change with times and places, but rather itself transforms times and places since as a greater force it draws to itself what is lesser." (Letter 2 to Bro. Barsabba)

Hence the saints are agents of transformation for their own times. So Christ compares his saints to salt and light (Mt. 5:13-14). Sahadona gives the examples of Noha, Abraham, Lot, Joseph and Moses who were able to remain faithful to God in adverse circumstances. While the stupid and those inclined to sin are not saved even by holy places. Adam for example sinned in Paradise, sons of Heli in the temple; Girzi the disciple of Elizeus and Judas the disciple of Christ fell away inspite of the holy influence they received from the presence of their masters.

In this perspective what is important in the lives of the saints is their clean heart, clear insight and interior meditation which exercised a rational control of passions and emotions. Here St. Paul's antithesis between interior men and exterior men is quite relevant. All the external practices of prayer, asceticism, renunciation, penitence and fight against passions and demons have only a negative and relative value, they prepare and condition in the interior man the expansion of the fruits of the spirit, faith, hope and charity.

According to this view the saints demonstrate an entirely new orientation for human life. Through renunciation, self discipline and solitude they identify themselves with Christ, and contemplating the angels of light and

the crowds of saints they lose sight of those friends and relations in the body and bring out a new fellowship with the three Persons of the triune Godhead and the citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Jesus of Nazareth is the model for all saints. He was a human being just like any one else and had to proceed by trial and error, experiencing and learning. But he was man led by the Holy Spirit through the instructions of the Torah, traditional institutions of Judaism, and the example and admonitions of Mary his mother and other teachers. This Spirit-led education moved him to recognize other human beings as persons and God himself as Father in relationship with whom he slowly discovered his own divine sonship. Modelled on this presence of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father the saint develops his sensitivity to other persons and to God, with an ever intensifying degree of presence to one another and of mutuality. The ability to receive the other as other is basically an opening to God, wholly the other and it is proportionate to one's ability to be fully present to another as oneself. The Spirit of God produces the betweenness in the circumcession of persons in the Trinity of God and also in the fellowship of persons in the people of God. The secret of this betweenness of the Spirit uniting the free human person and wholly the Other God is that the Spirit is not an object. He is known as the inner source of our own selfhood; in and through the Spirit we know everything else. God is not an object of our thought, since he cannot be placed outside of and additional to the finite thinking subjects. Nor can human persons be grasped as objects, since only in and through our subjectivity and the stirrings of the Spirit can we come to an understanding of other subjects. Thus the saint is one who discloses by his life the intersubjectivity of persons moved by the Spirit. Hence the saint does not appear as an exception of an isolated figure, but a point of attraction cementing all into unity.

What makes one a saint is not the keenness of perception or the comprehensive character of his intellectual knowledge, but the depth of love. Indeed there are mys-

tics who have an emotional approach to the divine, others with an intellectual or rational orientation and yet others who take an intuitive mode of knowledge. But the basic requisite is the comprehension of love, which takes a holistic approach to the divine object. Often following the reflection of the heart and the lock of the Spirit towards the beloved object, we perceive an object without seeing it clearly and we hear a word without understanding it distinctly. The root of distinct view and intelligible audition is tied to intelligence Love, on the other hand, is occupied with the object as a whole. In knowing there is a clear limit beyond which all is darkness for our intellect. For love there is no single limit and it can encounter light inaccessible in the confines of non-knowing and embrace wholly the Other as one's beloved. Hence every saint is a man of love who directly embraces the inaccessible and infinite reality of God and in the dark light of the divinity sees all things as it were through divine eyes and according to the divine plan for each one. Sahadona says in one of his letters..."the Supreme God is the specific object of charity (ga. 5:14). But it is peace that engenders charity (Col. 3:14-15). So peace is the perfect good of community life, since it is through it that we are able to please God and at the same time others as well. We cannot acquire charity toward God except through mutual love, following the sacred words." I Jn. 4:21: (Letter n. 3 CSCO Vol. 255, Script Syrill 3 p. 16)

On account of this love of God which is realized actually in the love of one's neighbour the saints are also men of action. At the height of ecstasy love expands into charitable and fruitful action, by which the perfect become "useful to others without suffering anything by it" (See *The Book of Perfection* I, iv, 3,31-38, I iv, 4, 28).

As Gregory Nazianzen says: "It is proper to a strong, perfect and wise soul to hold account always with one's own proper interest, that of the community, to show towards others the same solicitude as for oneself. For it is not for oneself alone that each one of us exists but for all men, for all who participate in nature" (Gregory Nazianzen Or

25, PG 35, 1205 A-B). Contemplation is not a passive receptivity, but the directions of the human spirit going back and forth between God and created beings. It passes from the creatures to the Creator, from the Creator to oneself from oneself to the process of salvation of beings without withdrawing from the search for God in all things.

According to this view saints are profoundly human, authentically religious impregnated with the simplicity of the Bible. This is in sharp contrast with the artificial and dry theology that presents holiness as something entirely out of the ordinary. Even the miracles and favours granted by the intercession of saints are not magical events to prove their power with God but the meeting between man's need and God's grace. They show how much the saints are part of our human community. To the extent people place their confidence in the holy people, have faith in their message and seek their intercession, God also blesses that faith by granting favours and miracles.

### Conclusion

These different images of holiness reveal more our attitude to a life of holiness than intrinsic distinctions in holiness itself. So these images are rather complementary and not exclusive. The Western image of the saint as a hero standing head and shoulders above other people indicate a distinctively Graeco-Roman style of life always in struggle, constantly searching and growing towards the unattainable goal. The saints who were victorious in this struggle especially the martyrs give us hope and confidence that we will win one day. The Indian view of the saint has an inward looking attitude towards life, full of confidence that what we are is more important than that we have to acquire or to become. The goal we seek is not out there or up there but within the cave of our own heart, and we have only to become aware of it. Perhaps it has a slight note of condescension in its attitude towards others who have not attained the same realization as the saints have.

Still the saints are not exceptions but only forerunners leading the way for others to follow.

Perhaps the most comprehensive view of holiness is presented by the Hebrew and Oriental perspective. The saints are fully human, part and parcel of our human communitarian existence. With Christ the Risen Lord they show forth the joy and glory of salvation which we are eventually to attain. They proclaim and demonstrate our fellowship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and among ourselves in a spirit of mutuality and love. By declaring our oneness with them and seeking divine favours through their intercession we strengthen human fellowship with them.

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## **Personality and Mission of Blessed Kuriakos Elias Chavara**

The life story of Blessed Kuriakos Elias Chavara is the history of the Syro-Malabar Church in the last century. Throughout his life Father Chavara was under the authority of the Latin Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly and greatly dependent on the Latin Carmelite missionaries for spiritual inspiration and guidance. Still, all his ideas concerning religious life and theological thinking itself were basically Oriental, derived from the ideals of Eastern and Indian monasticism, combined with an active orientation for the service of the people. In the same way though the Syro-Malabar church was under the administration of Latin bishops assisted by a number of Latin missionaries, under the guidance and inspiration of eminent persons like Fathers Thomas Porukara, Thomas Palackal and Blessed Kuriakos Elias the evolution and development of ecclesial life proceeded on genuinely Oriental lines.

So what the Syro-Malabar church today is owes a great deal to the saintly personality of Blessed Chavara and others. Saints may not need us, as we need them, and in a particular way they glorify the places in which they lived and they have stamped there the indelible marks of their passing. They do not stand alone, but by a sort of personal magnetism bring together a number of persons to feel together, to work together and build up God's church. The spiritual personality of Blessed Kuriakos is unintelligible without the deep piety and holiness of his mother, the austere and self-sacrificing dedication of his teacher Father Thomas Palackal, the deep insight and commitment of his senior companion and mentor Father Thomas Porukara and others.

Here a word about Fr. Thomas Porukara and his influence on Fr. Chavara will not be inopportune. Perhaps Fr. Porukara represents best the aspirations of the then Kerala Church. He was brought up in a very devout Christian family and when he wanted to embrace the priestly life his father insisted that he should have the best training available for it and sent him to the seminary at Verapoly. After ordination he became the pastor in his own parish and in a short time achieved a total spiritual renovation of it through regular Sunday homilies, solemn liturgical services with the active participation of the faithful, administration of the Sacraments, daily gathering of children in the church for the evening prayers and similar activities. Later in other parishes like Thankassery that were far from ideal his pastoral zeal effected a radical change in the outlook of the people so that some families resembled religious monasteries. But Father Porukara's heart's desire from early in life was to leave the world and lead a life of contemplation in solitude. Though he was not able to do that in the beginning, later as secretary to the Bishop he shared with his friend Father Thomas Palackal his conviction that for the spiritual renewal of the Church a religious house for priests was the most effective means. When this desire was approved by the Bishop and the religious house at Mannanam was founded in 1831, Father Porukara did not slacken his pastoral zeal for the people. He strove hard to inspire them through sermons and retreats and the careful celebration of the liturgy. With his ascetic and mystic friend Father Thomas Palackal he set forth the ideal of combining contemplation with action which ideal Blessed Kuriakos Elias Chavara, their younger companion and survivor, continued to uphold.

Father Kuriakos was a man of imagination originality, creativity and dynamic leadership who, reading the mind of the people, their yearnings and aspirations, directed them in various paths of apostolic development.

Pope John Paul II in his homily during the beatification ceremony enumerating the various activities undertaken by Blessed Chavara for the service of the Syro

Malabar church says: "For nearly all of his sixty-five years of earthly life he laboured generously for the renewal and enrichment of the Christian life. His deep love for Christ filled him with apostolic zeal and made him especially careful to promote the unity of the Church." This paper explores the different aspects of Chavara's spiritual personality, his personal sanctity, apostolic involvement, and his style of contemplation in action.

## I. Docility to the Holy Spirit

### a. Baptismal integrity of the Servant of God

My good parents had instilled in me a special love and devotion to the Holy Family. Since I was always remembering and honouring the Holy Family, by the grace of God, I feel confident to confess that by their protection I had not the misfortune to lose at any time in my life, the grace I received in Holy Baptism.

The above quoted words of Bl. Chavara, to the sorrowing inmates of the house that knelt down around his deathbed, reveal the over-all picture of his life. What Fr. Chavara confessed on his deathbed, bears testimony to the newness of his life after the spirit of Baptism. In short, Baptism reformed his life-style after the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit. Hence the words of St. Paul were realised in him! "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."(Rom 8:14)

#### a. Human origin and spiritual birth

Born on 10 February 1805, at Chennamkary, Kerala, India, Kuriakos was baptized at the parish Church on the 16th of the same month. At that time there was the practice of dedicating the newly baptized children to the patronage and protection of our Lady at one or other of her celebrated shrines. The shrine of our Lady at Vechoor, Archdiocese of Ernakulam, in the present district of Kottayam was one and the parents of Kuriakos took him there on the feast of the Nativity of our Lady and dedicated him

to our Lady. Fr. Chavara himself gives the description of the event in his *Athmanuthapam*:

My mother, when she was still suckling me, laid me at the feet of the Mother of God as her servant, praying: 'Holy Mother, Virgin Mary of God, I who am an impure handmaid, dedicate at your holy feet today, this fruit of my womb, so that you may protect him as your servant'. Then the priest in charge took me and, in the name of the Mother of God, put flower and water into the hands of my Mother and holding my little hands entrusted me to her in the name of the Mother of God saying, 'carefully educate, protect and guard this one as a Servant of God; in truth he is not your son, but verily he is a servant of the Mother of God' (pp. 7-8).

This act of dedication was renewed year after year at the shrine for several years.

When the child was of age he was sent to school. Young Kuriakos learned the vernacular languages, Malayalam and Tamil at the local school.

At the end of his primary education, Kuriakos committed himself to the guidance of Fr. Thomas Palackal for his priestly formation. In those days the candidates for priesthood in the Syro-Malabar Church were generally trained by a *malpan*, who was either the parish priest himself or the elderly priest of the parish. After the required study and training he was ordained priest by Mgr. Stabilini in November 1829.

The first among the factors that influenced Fr. Chavara's life was "Thomas Margam" — sum total of the ecclesial traditions of the St. Thomas Christians.

The spiritual heritage of the individual Christian Churches depends on the traditions which they have inherited from the ancient centres of Christianity. However, at the time of Fr. Chavara, the Church in Kerala had come under the influence of western civilization. Consequently Indian ways were thought to be less and less appropriate to their religion. Nevertheless, the influence

of women in the formation of children remained intact. There were great stress on obedience, humility and discipline.

Young Chavara, naturally, owed a lot to his mother in his early formation. Spiritual formation of Fr. Chavara was effected mainly through the training he received in the family. The Church was also a great influence in the family traditions of the Thomas Christians.

The hierarchy at that time of Fr. Chavara consisted of missionaries from abroad, who administered the needs of the different individual churches. However, Fr. Chavara's education and training did not remain entirely Indian. For while a boy he was entrusted to the care of certain priests who trained him in the western Christian educational system. But at the same time Fr. Chavara was conscious of the spirit of the Syro-Malabar Church and the training he had from his family.

The tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church had given much stress to the spiritual side of life. The religious practices of the family too played a predominant part.

The home-centred liturgy of the Thomas Christians helped much in the character formation of Fr. Chavara. Since his father died at an early age, his mother took on herself the duty of bringing up the child.

In his autobiography Fr. Chavara mentions his mother's influence on his childhood together with the providence of God which led him to the total dedication of his life to Him. Fr. Chavara says:

Thus when I was ten, in your great mercy you did call me, and I am profoundly convinced of this; otherwise, I would not have come here; at that time there was none of my family in this state of life. Someone accidentally told me to enter this state of life. When my mother heard of this she was immensely pleased; she was convinced that it was a very good thing to give God one of the two sons, and then from on she worked for this. Then God in His abundant mercy willed that, being separated from them, I should ap-

proach Him (Fr. Chavara, *Athmanuthapam*, pp. 5-6). These lines show the options young Chavara had in his early life. He was devoutly attending the additional spiritual exercises of his mother besides the normal activities of the other members.

### b. Chrismation and spiritual growth

A Christian makes his fundamental option in favour of God revealed in Jesus by faith and baptism; but it is developed by the daily choices of the christian life. Free choices are ineluctable for man, and every choice strengthens or weakens his ultimate orientation toward God or self, toward freedom or servitude. In this way, Fr. Chavara gradually "puts on Christ", builds himself as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:18).

The present choice builds on past and prepares for future ones. Only the last choice of man's life, the final option, which takes place at the moment of death, is believed to express fully the integrated personality of man because it sums up and recapitulates the nature of the qudasa of 'chrismation'. The basic option in the case of young Chavara depended on the mentality of his mother and the sacramental life that derived from the family.

As we have already seen regarding the spiritual growth of Fr. Chavara, he received a taste for the interior life from his mother, who was the soul of the family. God was preferred to all else in the family life and naturally young Chavara dedicated himself totally to God.

### c. Personality development and spiritual integrity

The integrity of a spiritual person, mainly depends on the special vocation, he has from God in the society. Young Chavara had to, develop his personality after the model of an ideal priest, for such was his call from God. Fr. Chavara had contacts with Fr. Thomas Palackal from the very early days of his life. Fr. Palackal took a personal interest in Chavara and taught him the doctrines of the church.

After his ordination to priesthood, Fr. Palackal took a greater interest in Fr. Chavara. He gave him sound ad-

vice to lead an ideal life in the individual church. Fr. Chavara gives his impression on his seminary life:

Malpan expected learning and at the same time, insisted that the clerics conduct the church ceremonies solemnly that the people may have interest in them. Otherwise the monastery would not have sufficient candidates (*Stapakapithakanmar*, p. 15).

In these few remarks about Fr. Palackal, we see his position in the seminary, and how he helped Fr. Chavara to form an ideal personality.

Another factor that influenced Fr. Chavara's personality is his ecclesial life. Fr. Chavara was whole heartedly devoted to the hierarchy and viewed the Church from that point of view. Fr. Chavara's personality was formed after the spirit of the Church, when he conceived it as a fundamental encounter with God on the one hand and fellow beings on the other. Fr. Chavara's whole life was identified with his ecclesial life.

When we analyse his ecclesial life we see his position as an ordinary faithful and a talented person working with the hierarchical structures of the Church.

Convinced by his seminary education and confirmed by his personal studies, Fr. Chavara remained always obedient to the legitimate authorities, maintained a community feeling, above all, showed absolute docility to the Holy Spirit, and decided to become a religious in the canonical sense and consequently to practise perfect charity.

#### d. Newly formed Eucharistic community in Kerala

The ecclesial life of Fr. Chavara had its definitive start by his vocation to priesthood and later to religious life. As one of his biographers noted, young Chavara was pleasing to God and man, because he was a store house of humility, meekness, modesty, devotion and other natural qualities of intelligence and conversation (*Eliseus, Stapakapithakanmar*, p. 15).

Fr. Chavara set his mind on reforming the community entrusted to him. Since he was a gifted preacher his method of forming the new community was of preaching

the Word of God. He enforced the practice of preaching homilies in churches on all Sundays and feast-days. He sent members of his religious congregation to the various churches to preach mission. He started catecumenates attached to each chapel of his institute, for the instruction of non-Christians.

Fr. Chavara with his teachers soon realised the need of a new seminary for the education of the candidates to both religious and diocesan priesthood. So in the year 1833 a seminary was started attached to the religious house at Mannanam. This seminary served the needs of the whole Syro-Malabar Church for several years.

In the year 1844, Archbishop Francis Xavier, Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly appointed Fr. Chavara as the Preceptor and Examiner of all the Syrian clergy in the vicariate Apostolic of Verapoly. From the order of the appointment we extract the following lines:

Your eminent virtues and your practical knowledge induce us to appoint you as preceptor and examiner of all the Syrian clergy in our apostolic vicariate. By this patent letter we authorise you to admit candidates for the reception of the orders and to grant them faculties for hearing confession.

Along with the pastoral care of the Syrian community Fr. Chavara got the burden of guiding the newly formed religious congregation which was still on its way to canonical approval. The members of the Institute steadily grew in number and they helped much for the progress and development of the Kerala Church. As often as the local ordinary desired, Fr. Chavara and other members of the Institute went out to preach missions in parishes.

At the time of Fr. Chavara, the liturgical practices of the Syrian Church in Kerala, had lost their integrity. Fr. Chavara could bring about a uniformity in the celebration of the Sacred liturgy in the Syrian Rite. He also edited the Divine Office for priests and religious and rubrics of the solemn High Mass and solemn vespers.

All-round reforms of Chavara with his foresight

turned to the formation of a eucharistic community strengthened by the eucharistic celebration.

The Syrian Church of Kerala will be indebted to Fr. Chavara for the role played by him for the protection of the Church from the Rocosian intervention. In the year 1861, the Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon sent a bishop Mar Rocos, to visit Kerala and report on the condition of the Syrian Church. But in fact Mar Rocos made a division among the Syrians.

Archbishop Bernardine, Vicar apostolic of Verapoly, appointed Fr. Kuriakos, Vicar General of the Syrians of his flock, with the extraordinary powers to meet the situation. Within the space of less than ten months, Fr. Chavara exposed the pretensions of Rocos and persuaded him to leave the country, and thus brought back all the dissenters to the authority of their legitimate pastor. His continuous labour as Vicar General and preacher effected a thorough renovation in the spiritual and social life of the Church.

## II. 'Diakonia of the Servant of God

### a. Founder's charism

Fr. Chavara gave shape to various new movements in life of the Church. His attention turned to the canonical erection of his religious community and to the beginning of more religious houses and even religious communities for men and women. His ardent love for God and for his fellowmen, urged him to create centres for solitude and contemplation, out of which the glory of God and the divinization of men should result.

The several religious houses founded by Fr. Chavara were meant for religious priests. The priests were active in the field of apostolate and they were authentic preachers of the Word of God in the sense that they contemplated the Word of God and shared it with their fellowmen.

He was not content with the foundation of many religious houses for men. His profound mission urged him

to start religious houses for women whose authentic presence would bring much benefit to the people of God.

When Fr. Chavara tried to start an Institute of religious life for women in Malabar, his spiritual director Fr. Leopold was ready to co-operate with him.

Fr. Chavara's charism and profound vision in starting religious houses for men and women had far reaching results. He had the recognition of the ecclesiastical authorities and the co-operation of the people of God. Thus both the people of God in the Individual Churches and legitimate authorities were illumined by the charism of Fr. Chavara and it did, not a little, towards the social and spiritual betterment of the society.

#### b. Charismatic renewal and ecclesial formation

Fr. Chavara's charismatic personality was not limited to the particular communities of the religious, but it spread over the various fields of the Individual Church. He made many attempts to enrich the community with the true spirit of the universal Church.

Fr. Chavara made a very sincere effort to improve the spiritual conditions of the priests and the people. He prepared the people toward a charitable disposition. He cared for the betterment of the poor and the depressed and for the welfare of the lower classes.

He prepared the clergy with a proper training to work among the flock. He organized annual retreats for the priests. He cared not only for the improvement of the clergy but also of the entire people. He concentrated his attention on the parish missions. Home-centred liturgies and participation in parish services were valuable contributions towards the enrichment of the people.

#### c. Evolution of a whole people of God

The outstanding services of Fr. Chavara in the field of literature and education helped the community in Malabar to reach a distinguished position in India. He was really a pioneer in this field. The progress the laity made,

owes to a great extent, to the profound vision of Fr. Chavara.

His intimacy with God led him to look after the needs of the brethren especially in their intellectual and cultural formation. His continued labours as a charismatic leader and preacher effected a thorough renovation in the spiritual and social life of the entire people of Kerala. The establishment of schools attached to all the ecclesiastical Institutes and the starting of a press were the chief means by which Fr. Chavara paved the way for the evolution of a whole people of God.

a. Spiritual growth of the Servant of God  
and the growth of the universal Church

Fr. Chavara had a unique position in the post of teaching seminarians. This role of teaching, preaching and governing was fulfilled with special charism he had from the beginning. As a teacher, he was always the director of the students for priesthood. This role of teaching the doctrine of the Church made him a "Malpan".

Special characteristics of Fr. Chavara as a spiritually mature person are attested to by his contemporaries, superiors as well as his devout children in the priestly and religious order. Archbishop Bernardine wanted always to have Fr. Chavara for consultation. Fr. Leopold, his spiritual Father, declared the heroic character of Fr. Chavara's sanctity by affirming his "exemplary life for the novices in the order", "his virtue-oriented saintliness", his humility, great charity, devotion to duty, and obedience to duly constituted authority.

### **III. Fr. Chavara's contemplation in action**

a. Chavara's experience of God shared

Through his faithfulness to God's call he attained a mystical experience of God. Out of an inner conviction, he sings:

"Thou hast willed my ascension to you."

Holy Spirit impelled him to look at everything in its proper perspective and then to know, love and serve God through the people.

In his spiritual life he had already given himself to God by his baptismal commitment which was further deepened by his priestly and religious life. But above all he committed himself, the faculties of his spirit, soul and body, in the spirit of obedience, to the will of God. God filled his soul, with acts of love and gratitude, and admiration, and he was obedient to them.

Fr. Chavara's *Athmanuthapam* gives details of his mystical experience:

Oh Lord, master of beginning itself, thou hast created me also the son of Adam. What for, Lord? Thy mercy which is itself without beginning, alone accounts for it. Thou hast willed to grant me existence as a man to rise up to the exalted height of Thy company (pp. 1-2).

What is clear from his words is his deep experience of God.

Elevated by the gift of God his faith saw everything in the universe as a marvelous working of God (*Ibid* p.2). In a way his mystical experience of God helped him to contemplate the beauties of the universe (*Ibid* pp. 13,21). And hence he wrote the beautiful works of *Dhyanasallapangal* and *Athmanuthapam* in order that he could share his experience of God with the people of God.

#### b. A new approach to the oriental spirituality

The very opening words of Fr. Chavara's *Dhyanasallapangal* show that he was very humble before God.

"I am not worthy for the highest perfection and for high meditation, because I am a great sinner."

This selfknowledge he had from his relationship with God through meditation. At the same time he writes:

You will have the grace for meditation, since he called you to this state.

From these words we see that his ascetical life was based on an absolute dependence on God.

Fr. Chavara saw that his life totally depended on God's power. The spiritual life is the spirit received and sanctifying grace, the effect on this is "a being possessed by God, who first possesses the soul. Possession by God is the same as the divine indwelling according to Scriptures (Cf. Jn. 14:17; Rom. 8:9-10; Cor. 3:16). Fr. Chavara was conscious of an absolute possession by God and that helped him to see all things as coming from the grace of God.

The grace Fr. Chavara received from God was perfected and promoted by his ascetical life according to the oriental traditions. The new approach he adopted was an integrated one consisting of oriental and occidental elements. Msgr. Baccinelli nominated Fr. Chavara Vicar General of the Syrians of Malabar, to look after their spiritual needs. Fr. Chavara had to look after the affairs of the Syrians but at the same time to obey the Latin authorities.

Fr. Chavara's attitude towards the authority of God expressed itself in his theology of obedience. He always respected the legitimate authorities out of his living faith in the power of God. In this light he viewed "the representatives of the Holy Father, as well as the missionaries, the preachers of the Church" (*Athmanuthapam*, p. 11). He was possessed by God, and he was an instrument in the hands of God for his apostolate.

### c. Contemplation in action-a unique spirituality

Fr. Chavara's deep humility, and the consciousness of his absolute dependence on God, led him to the heights of spiritual life. He cultivated the habit of a continuous practice of humility, which led him to the prayer of contemplation.

He could be called a contemplative in the proper sense of the term, and at the same time he was a contemplative in action. He was conscious of the presence of God and he made use of it through out his conversation with God.

While living a contemplative life, he was immersed in apostolic activities. He could overcome the dichotomy of contemplation and action.

To be with God is equivalent to the idea of being in contemplation, where as the services to be rendered to one's brethren correspond with action. Indeed, there is no worthwhile activity on the road to the spiritual life without the contemplative dimension. Because, the root, the source of contemplation and the root of action are the same Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was sent by the Father, so he sent his apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Such an integration of contemplation and action is one of the characteristics of the monasticism and spirituality of the Oriental Churches, to which Fr. Chavara belongs.

Kuriakose Elias Vadaketh

# **Literary Contributions of Blessed Kuriakos Chavara**

Father Chavara dedicated his life to the Service of God. This he did by means of the faithful performance of his pastoral duties and the widespread dissemination of his ideas through his writings. Both these were means aimed at achieving the same end ... directing men towards God and making them participate in His love.

This is an attempt to peep into Father Chavara's intellectual services through his writings.

## **The Works of Father Chavara**

The published works of Father Chavara are the following <sup>1</sup>:

1. Chronicles
2. Literary works
3. Spiritual works
4. Letters

The title for each division has been adopted from the point of view of content. All his works together describe Father Chavara's lifelong endeavour to realise God in his own life with all the hopes and disappointments along the way. His purpose might also have been to assist others in their own spiritual struggle. In other words, the source and aim of all his writings were spiritual, coming from his intense desire for the salvation of others.

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1. The complete works of Chavara have been published in four Volumes by the C. M. I. Publishing Committee in 1981-82. Given above is the division adopted by them.

## A. Historical Works

### 1. Chronicles

These daily notes which have survived the passage of time can be considered Father Chavara's invaluable contribution to the church of Kerala. They are permanent historical records which shed light on the history of the Kerala Church, during the forty years between 1829 and 1869. The aim of the author was not to write history. He was only recording in the form of daily notes in his diary, events which he had seen, heard about or taken part in, with perfect honesty and the power of close observation. These notes written down at Mannanam and Koonammavu bring to light many historical events. The establishment of the first indigenous monastic Congregation (now known as the C. M. I.), its growth, its ways of life and its services are described in vivid detail. The *Chronicles* narrates elaborately endeavours of the Founding Fathers to build the first Monastery at Mannanam and the bitter and sweet experiences they had throughout this ordeal. Besides, this work is a full picture of the Kerala Church of the time.

The *Chronicles* includes short biographies of the Founding Fathers, Thomas Porukara and Thomas Palackal. This part of the work draw our attention to the spirit and motive force behind the establishment of the Congregation.

We also get a valuable record of the steps taken to have the next five Monasteries started at Koonammavu, Elthuruth, Plassanal, Vazhakulam and Ambazhakat and the first Carmelite Convent established at Koonammavu. The Rocos schism, the introduction of Forty-hour-Adoration in Kerala, other relevant incidents and events are mentioned and described in it.

The matter reported, whether gained from direct knowledge or derived from personal experience is presented clearly and objectively without concealment or omission. For the Religious Community at Mannanam and the Catholic Church as well as the other Christian Communities, the fifteen years following 1855 was a very important period.

The historical events of the period are not recorded anywhere else as objectively or elaborately as here. This work helps us also to understand the growth and development of the Malayalam language at that time.

## 2. Letters

*Letters published as the fourth volume of the works of Father Chavara* is a collection of 67 letters. Some of them short, but several are long. Among them are the two letters sent in 1861 and 1870 to the Pope, a few letters written between 1861 and 1869 to the Propaganda Congregation. Enquiry reports and petitions forwarded to Varapuzha and letters sent to the Carmelite Superiors in Rome, the other Monasteries, the Convent and the members of his own Parish.

The *Letters* like the *Chronicles* is of great historical value. We realise that, even at a time, when correspondence was not easy, Father Chavara was particular about consulting the concerned authorities or reporting to them at the proper time. Most of these letters are written in his own handwriting. As they also show the place and date of writing exactly, they become all the more authentic

*Letters* reveals Father Chavara a man of action. The letters were the effective means by which he transmitted to others his plan of action for materialising the schemes he had visualised. They were used by him in order to put fervour into his fellow religious, to instil greater christian culture and morality into his fellow-Catholics and to seek solutions for the prevailing dissensions in the local church.

The epistle entitled *A good Father's Death-bed Words*<sup>2</sup> is addressed to the members of his own Parish, Kainakary in Changancherry diocese, written in 1868 is not merely a letter. It is a lengthy exhortation laying out very important guide lines for the bringing up of children and the maintenance of the sanctity of family life. These rules of Family Life reveal the authors abounding spirituality, psychological insight and practical sense.

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2. Complete works of Father Chavara Vol. IV. p. 137ff

## B. Literary Works

The works other than the above have been grouped under two heads by the Publishing Committee, namely, literary works and spiritual works. This division seems to be quite artificial. For all the writings of Fr. Chavara are filled with spiritual vision and are intended to lead the readers to the experience of God.

### 1. Athmanuthapam (Song of Repentance)<sup>3</sup>

The longest of these works - the "Song of Repentance" ... is autobiographical. It also expresses the Poet's own view of life. It has more than 2000 couplets couched in the traditional singing rhymes which have been conveying for long the emotional strains of rural Kerala. The first two parts embody autobiographical narration. The rest is a poetic presentation of the life history of Christ. The devout praises of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ and mankind with reference to her role as co-redemptrix and numerous pieces of moral and spiritual exhortation are incorporated in the body of the poem in appropriate places.

Throughout the poem there lurks the heartfelt remorse of the poet at not having been sufficiently grateful to God who had endowed him with free will and various other gifts, and obedient to the divine will in his own life as expressed through the promptings of his conscience. The all-pervasive theme of the poem is the consciousness of sin and the consequent repentance which are the basic concepts underlying christian mysticism. Father Chavara who could, a few days before his death, declare that he had never lost the white robe (Grace) he received at baptism, is seen in this poem bewailing like a great sinner (II: 134-144; V: 174-180; VI: 229-236).

#### **The vision of Christ**

Underlying the whole poem is the christian belief that conciliation between God and man will be possible

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3. *Ibid*, Vol. II, pp 1-127

through Christ, the son of God who became man. Those who see Christ see God, and out of this conviction springs the prayer — "help me see" with which ends every stanza in part 3 (III:1-100).

His closeness to God attained through his vision of Christ does not prompt Father Chavara to escape from the world or to detach himself away from his fellowmen. On the contrary he yearns to bring Christ, the God with us, to the people and impart to them his own experience of God. He is seen in many places in this work praying for sinners for this intention.

Two ideas are evident in his presentation of the history of Christ — It was to redeem man from sin that the Word became flesh; the sufferings, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ lift man upto God. Parts IV to X of this poem enshrine these ideas. "The main purpose Father Kuriakos achieved through the indigenous rhymes is to bring Christ to the people instead of taking them to the religion of Christ", says Sri C.P. Sreedharan<sup>4</sup>.

Again in the words of the same critic, "Father Kuriakos Elias is an unforgettable luminary in the firmament of XIXth century Malayalam Literature. He will be remembered even after other great intellectual giants of the period are forgotten. For at a time when life as reflected in Literature was immersed in a flood of sexual love, he alone made the redemptive Ganga of his poetry flow down from the white peaks of his towering spirituality. Most significant is that his way became the illuminating and sublimating inspirational force to redeem life and literature from the depths of decay"<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Pana (A Choral Dirge)

Father Chavara had a firm conviction about the Communion among the church triumphant, the church suffering and the church struggling. This "Choral Dirge" inculcates

4. Chavara Centenary Volume, 1871-1971, Prakasam, Alleppey, pp. 76-77.

5. *Ibid*

the ideal attitude we should have towards the second, the souls being purified of the slightest blemish in purgatory. This poem of more than 500 couplets is a string of parables and episodes intended to be read in a house of mourning, inspiring the most spiritual thoughts in the minds of those who assemble there<sup>6</sup>.

"The day of death is better than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting." It is with this quotation from Ecclesiastes that the Poet introduces to the readers stirring thoughts about the aim and end of life. In the lines that follow he exhorts through images and episodes to help souls in purgatory through prayers and penance.

This poetic work serves the purpose of leading the readers' mind into those inner realms of Christian theology that deals with man's end. It helps us understand the deeper meaning of the words of Christ and make our life meaningful. Even though the theme is sufferings in purgatory the poem is ultimately intended to inculcate the consciousness of the end of life which every follower of Christ should have.

### 3. The Martyrdom of Anastasia

While "A Choral Dirge" opens to us the regions of the suffering Church in Purgatory, *The Martyrdom of Anastasia*<sup>7</sup> reveals to us a phase of the struggling Church on earth. A Christian's greatest duty is to persist in the faith during his life. Father Chavara might have felt that at the time of the Rocos Schism the people needed to be reminded of this so that they should remain loyal to the one church.

In the third Century A.D. Emperor Valerian of Rome started the most violent persecution of the Christian church.

6. Complete works of Chavara Vol. II, p. 135ff.

The practice of chanting together dirges in a house where a person is dead till the end of the funeral by the friends and relatives assembled there is still prevalent in Kerala.

7. Complete works of Father Chavara Vol. II p. 175.

At that time, he summoned the young woman, Anastasia out of the convent. The poem contains the parting advice of Sophia her mistress and a description of how she boldly and gladly suffered all the tortures and gave her life up to Christ.

This poetic work has a well-knit story: it is written in a simple and beautiful style; and the mode of narration is bound to strengthen the faith of the reader. *The Martyrdom of Anastasia* can very well revive the spirit of faith in any one tormented by doubts and questionings.

#### 4. The Sallapangal

Of all the works of Father Chavara *The Dyana Sallapangal* (The Meditational Monologues)<sup>8</sup> is the one most expressive of the author's God-experience. Most of them are diary notes of spiritual experiences. In them are transcribed the quite natural monologues addressed to Jesus Christ, Mother Mary and St. Teresa of Avila.

Through these spiritual exercises, he expresses his gratitude to the generous blessings showered on him by the loving God and his sorrow for the smallest lapses in his personal life. These notes also reveal his intense longing for the deepest meditational experiences. He calls God Appa (*Abba*)<sup>9</sup>. This word repeated 31 times brings to our mind the picture of the prodigal son and the forgiving father of the Gospel-Parable. The same word is used to address Jesus Christ also.

It is this work that reveals to us most vividly Father Chavara's spiritual vision. Meditational Monologues convince us that he had his own concept of prayer into which were integrated the prayer-concepts of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Teresa of Avila<sup>10</sup>.

The burning love of God and the horror of sin that comes out of that melting-pot are the mainsprings of Father Chavara's spirituality. The father-son relationship

8. *Ibid* Vol. III, p. 13ff

9. *Ibid* Vol. III, p. 16.

10. *Ibid* p. 1

remains in its sublime heights all along, though the soul may be sunk in remorse at one time or stirred by love at another. Hence his spirituality ever remains lofty being absolutely free from any feeling of inferiority.

### 5. A guide for family life

The providing of a code of conduct for life in the family stands out as a signal service done by Father Chavara to his contemporaries and to posterity. His letter entitled *A Good Father's Death-bed Words*<sup>11</sup> addressed to his blood-relatives and fellow-parishioners at Kainakari is a valuable document. For it penetrates into the spiritual and psychological depths of family life, pointing out some essential values to be upheld there in practice.

He hoped that the family which is the corner stone of society should be firmly founded on brotherliness love and discipline. So he has put forward suggestions for, the cultivation of healthy relationship that would foster individual development and family integrity and for keeping off quarrels and dispute, miserliness and sumptuous living, injustice and idleness from the precincts of the family. This code for family life written in 1968 reflects contemporary ways of thinking. Yet the inner spirit enshrined in the document provides invaluable insights, even today. This is evident from the following instructions:

1. Let each member of the family forgive the shortcomings of others. That will give you peace on earth and eternal joy in heaven. How regrettable it is to find at home discord among brothers and women-folk.
2. Even animals can retaliate. But to forgive wrong is possible only for prudent, strong and dignified man.
3. All litigations ruin the family. Even in the most just case, we will eventually feel that it was better not to have gone to court.
4. Do not borrow money except where it is absolutely

11. *Ibid* Vol. IV p. 137ff

necessary. Try to clear all debts as quickly as possible.

5. Do not show off your wealth and power... Do not spend more than what you can on festivals and celebrations.
6. Do not contact relationship with families that despise order or have no fear of God.
7. The wealth of the family is not in the quantity of possessions, but in their quality.
8. The days on which you have not rendered any good to others will not be reckoned for the award of eternal life.
9. Don't refrain from giving alms whenever you can.
10. Do not let stolen things remain in your house even for a short while.
11. Do not deny or delay payment of just wages to labourers.
12. The essential worth of a family consists in its holiness and fear of God.
13. Parents, remember that it is your primary duty and responsibility to bring up your children properly.

These counsels and others in that letter are all intended to lead families to a life combining spirituality, personality development and social consciousness. They come from a closely observant and resourceful mind interested in the renewal of family life.

Any one who carefully goes through the works of Father Chavara will be led to the conviction that they are all attempts on the part of an adventurer in the service of the people of God to enlighten and guide them in the direction of an integrated development of Character and Personality.

# Biblical Concept of the Man of God

The Bible is the book of God, who in the beginning created heaven and earth and all things including man. God revealed his name to Moses as Yahweh, "I am who am" (Exod. 3:14). Bible is also the story of how humans slowly emerged such as to be partners to a covenant with God. The figure and personality of the man of God slowly evolves first as an agent of divine action in the world, then as one specially filled with the Spirit of God and divine holiness. Then it appears as a collective image of justified humanity, the just man fully realized in the humanity of Jesus Christ, the son of God incarnate. That holiness of Jesus Christ is shared by the apostles, and all the baptized commonly called saints. This paper will briefly explore this slow evolution of the image of the man of God, presenting the different facets and aspects of holiness, as seen in the Bible.

## Man of God, agent of divine activity

Man of God is first of all presented as an agent of divine activity. Thus Moses is titled man of God as he blessed the Children of God before his death (Dent 33:1). Moses is called both man of God and also servant of the Lord (Jos 13:6-7). The Spirit of God is personified as a dominating power that takes hold of individuals to work out God's designs through them. Thus Balaam the Mesopotamian soothsayer hired by Balak to curse Israel is taken over by the Spirit of God (Num 24:2). But it is Yahweh who puts the words in Balaam's mouth (Num 23:5-12; 16:17-26), though the spirit effects the ecstatic condition in the non-Hebrew prophet. This ecstatic state called 'prophesying' indicates the dominating character of the spirit (Num 11:17, 25-26; 1 Sam 10:6-10; 1 Sam 19:20-23). The spirit comes on

or possesses the man of Yahweh's choice without any apparent warning (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6-19; 15:14; 1 Sam 11:6; 16:13). The same phenomenon is clearly apparent in the selection of the seventy elders of Israel who get a share in the prophetic spirit of Moses (Num 11:17-25). The spirit took possession of Gideon, Samson, and other judges. Though the mighty coming of the spirit appears as an external force, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews notes, their extraordinary deeds were also a phenomenon of faith (Heb 11:29-34).

These men of God chosen by God and inspired by the spirit represent the consolidation of the chosen people. The coming of the spirit on them is a sign of authentication by Yahweh. The seventy-two elders chosen by Moses at God's command represent a charismatic group judging wisely the complex problems of a grumbling nomadic people. In Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson, the divine authentication results in military power and also the ability and wisdom for judging the nation. Above all the man of God appears as a messenger of the Lord communicating special revelations (Judg 13:6-8; 1 Sam 2:27). Samuel is described as a man of God, a seer, because "all he says come true", and the people held him in honour (1 Sam 9:6). Then the position of the prophet is institutionalized: At the command of the Lord, Samuel anoints Saul and God gave him a new heart, and he obtained the power of prophecy to be the wise leader of the nation (1 Sam 10:9-24). But when Saul became disloyal to the Lord, he is rejected and David is anointed king in his place over Israel: With the anointing 'the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward' (1 Sam 16:13). Kingship became a permanent institution in Israel.

### Prophecy and personal charisma

Even in the period when the figure of the man of God is identified with the institution of kingship, it is made clear that the spirit of God designates charismatic leadership.

1 Sam 16:13 makes it clear that the spirit passed from Saul to David. But from the time of Solomon, the spirit is not mentioned in relation to a reigning monarch. The kings become corrupt and the focus shifts to the charismatic leadership of the prophets. When the kingdom became divided under Rehoboam, son of Solomon, and Rehoboam wanted to retake the rebellious portion, 'the Word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God' indicating that the division was willed by the Lord (1 Kg 12:23-24). When Jeroboam introduced idolatrous practices to attract the loyalty of the people away from Jerusalem and his rival king, an anonymous 'man of God' appears on the scene to warn him and punish him. But the same man of God is punished for disobeying the instructions given to him by the Lord (1 Kg. ch. 13). This clearly brings out the image of the man of God as a free human being, inspired and led by the Spirit of God, but liable to fall away from that holiness if he failed to obey the Lord.

Elijah is perhaps the most typical man of God at the early stage of prophetism. He lived in northern Palestine around 850 B.C. When Israelites, who were a nomadic people pledged to worship Yahweh only, settled down in Palestine, they had a feeling that Yahweh was one among the gods only and that they needed other gods who controlled the fertility of the land and of animals. When Ahab became king he not only permitted idolatry as a political expediency but also encouraged fertility cults and married Jezebel of the Sidonians who brought with her a vigorous cult of Ba'al. The mission of Elijah was to proclaim to the people that Yahweh is the only true God and to ask the people to remain faithful to Yahweh leaving the cult of Ba'al (1 Kg 18:21). In a contest with the priests of Ba'al, Elijah proves that Yahweh is the Lord of fire and of rain. He kills the vanquished priests of Ba'al and declares unmistakably that Yahweh is the God of nature. Similarly Elijah is sent by Yahweh on a second mission to confront Ahab with his crime of stealing another man's property after Jezebel the queen had contrived the man's death through false accusations. Confronting the mighty

with the judgment of God is a common role of the prophets. Elijah's words bring Ahab to repentance, though his punishment pronounced on his family is only postponed.

Though Elijah acts with power in carrying out the mission entrusted to him by the Lord, he shows himself also a true human being subject to fear, weariness and despair. But he has complete trust in Yahweh's concern for the people and his fidelity to his promises. He appears as the lone prophet faithful to the Lord when all others had gone astray.

Amos coming about a century later than Elijah worked under King Jeroboam II. For more than two hundred and forty years Israelites had lived divided into two nations and the people enjoyed prosperity. The message of Amos is justice, not merely respecting the rights of each one in transactions, but social justice. Each section of society had to function in harmony with every other part, and this harmony was based on knowledge of God and relationship with him (Amos 3:2; 2:9-11). Those who oppress the poor and crush the needy (4:1), sell the righteous for silver... trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted (2:6-7) violate their covenant with the Lord. So 'the Day of the Lord' which was traditionally understood as God's intervention in human affairs to rearrange the world and set Israel at the centre of power and prestige, is for Amos a day of terror, and punishment for Israel (Amos 5:18-20). Similarly Yahweh judges not only Israel but other nations as well. So Amos emerges as a man of God for all people. Yahweh's power extends to any nation which does not practise justice.

Hosea who preached in Israel around 740-720 B.C. shows another type of a man of God proclaiming a God of love and compassion. Hosea married and had three children. But his wife Gomer left him to become a cult prostitute in a shrine of Ba'al, thus representing all the corruption and evil of Israel at that time. But Hosea symbolizing Yahweh's concern for Israel, reclaims Gomer, disciplines her and reinstates her fully at home as his wife.

and the mother of his children. It was a period of political confusion in Israel. In 25 years it had six kings and as in Elijah's time people were uncertain about who controlled the land's fertility. People were vacillating between Yahweh and Ba'al, just as political leaders tried various political alliances. Hosea speaks out against foreign alliances as well as the cult of fertility deities and calls for complete trust in Yahweh as the one God. He provides hope even in destruction. Breach of the covenant brings destruction and desolation; but this is Yahweh punishing his people to bring them back to a loving reunion (6:1-3).

From Elijah to the Babylonian exile, there is a silence on the spirit as working in the prophets. The reason for this was the presence of great many false prophets that misled the people. In 1 Kgs 22:24 we see the dramatic scene when four hundred prophets led by the lying spirit predict victory for Ahab against Syria while Micah the lone prophet predicted disaster and the events proved him right. Micah's explanation is: 'But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord' (Mic 3:8). The prophet, the man of God was very much a collective picture, almost the conscience of the people on the one hand, and a medium of Yahweh's work with Israel on the other. Yahweh cleanses Israel 'by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning' (Is 11:12). The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon the Messiah, the Spirit of Wisdom (Is 31:3). The most graphic picture of the collective just humanity is presented in the vision of Daniel: "And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him." (7:13-14) That the just who remained steadfast in their loyalty to God would gain an everlasting dominion which would not pass away, was the hope presented to God's people suffering persecution in the Babylonian captivity. A nobler collective picture of the saint is the servant of the Lord Isaias speaks of (42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:13-53,12). "Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen....I have put my

spirit upon him. he will bring forth justice to the nations". He is put up "as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49:6). He suffers for the sake of others. "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard."(50:6) "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried out sorrows...he was wounded for our transgressions...upon him was the chastisement that made us whole." (53:4-5) The real holy man is one who identifies himself with the sinful humanity and suffered vicariously for their iniquities. Naturally Christians from the earliest times have seen Jesus Christ reflected in these servant passages of Isaias. The saint is part and parcel of humanity yet stands above them by his intimacy with God, securing salvation for them.

### The individual saint

During the exile and in the period of restoration after it (593-460 B.C.) the emphasis shifts from the collective picture of the just man to the individual who is responsible before the Lord. The basic insight is stated by Elohu in the book of Job: "The spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." (33:4) The charismatic spirit is available even to ordinary individuals (Joel 2:28-29). God is present in the individual through his spirit. "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances." (Ezek 36:27) Hence the man of God is one internally regenerated by the Spirit, so that justice dwells in the wilderness and righteousness abide in the fruitful field (Is 32:16). So Job and Tobias appear as righteous individuals faithful to the covenant of the Lord, though they may have no public office or position.

### Personality of Jesus, the Holy One

Though the New Testament concentrates attention on the mission of Jesus and the work of salvation accomplished by him, his image as the Holy One of Israel has a central position in that work. Each of the Gospels has its particular approach to the personality of Jesus. St. Mark's Gospel

written for a persecuted Church presents Jesus as a new Israel emerging out of the waters of Jordan through the baptism of John the baptizer. When he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens open and the Spirit descend upon him like a dove (Mk 1:9-11). Jesus is the hidden Messiah; he emerges out of and not down the human context of life. The heaven which was silent from the days of the prophets speaks again, and the spirit of God and the Word of God become active again. Always the question is who Jesus is. The final revelation "You are the Christ" (Mk 8:27-31) is accompanied by the prediction of the Cross. The coming of the kingdom in the glory of transfiguration (9:1-8) is followed by the saying about the cross (9:12). For a suffering Church, Jesus appears as the new ideal man emerging out of the obscurity of ordinary humanity.

In St. Luke, Jesus appears as the leader of a praying Church, Jesus the healer who opens the eyes of the blind, makes the lame walk and cleanses lepers. The spirit descends on him when he was at prayer (Lk 4:21). Jesus is the leader of the new humanity, so his genealogy is traced back to Adam and God in a universalist fashion (Lk 3:21-22,30). The temptations of Jesus mark the beginning of a new humanity: The devil asks him to change stones into bread; Christ shows that humanity is nourished more by the Word of God than by mere material bread. If the world aims at temporal power and glory the ideal of the true humanity is God, who alone should be adored. Above the acclaim and wonder of the world, man should seek God's will (Lk 4:2-12). Jesus is the focus of holiness for humanity: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Lk 10:22) Holiness is no longer merely the power to effect things, but, the power to know the Father and the Son. It is a new fellowship of persons centred in the Son. It is not reserved to the wise and the powerful but open to the little ones, to the simple and the ordinary to whom the Father has revealed the mysteries of

God's kingdom hiding them from the wise and understanding (Lk 10:21).

St. Mathew presents the new fellowship as a new order of things of which the lawgiver is Jesus Christ. The basic constitution of this new kingdom is the law of love; "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The final judgment will be based on the principle that what one has done for the least of one's brethren one has done to Jesus himself. Words of Jesus are the fulfilment of the Old Law (Mt 7:24-27; 14:18; 23:2-3). St. John shows that Jesus is the author of holiness itself, the creative Word of God, the source of all life, and the light that illuminates every man that comes into the world. This word was made flesh and dwelt in our midst (Jn. ch.1). He is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). This Jesus dwells in us because he has given us his own Spirit (Jn 4:13).

### The holiness of the Christians

In Jesus of Nazareth, the biblical ideal of the man of God has reached its culmination. The divine plan is that in Jesus every man should find the fullness of his humanity. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (Jn 1:17) For, as St. Paul says, God "destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:5-6). All are justified in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:9-11). Just as all are made human beings as children of the first Adam, so all have divine life and holiness through Jesus Christ the Second Adam who is a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:42-50).

All humanity is rebuilt into a new edifice with Christ as the corner-stone and the apostles and prophets forming the foundation (Eph 2:20). So St. Peter calls upon all: "Come to him to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious, and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God

through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 2:4) Man cannot be really human by conforming to the ideals of the world, that can only reduce him to the level of the perishable and passing aspect of his life. Through Jesus Christ raised from the dead man has the possibility of being born anew through the living and abiding Word of God (1 Pet 1:21-23). The way and the law of the Spirit are opposed to the way of the flesh (Rom 8:1-13). In Christ, God has created a new humanity and has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. The saint is one who through his life of faith [and charity manifests this new humanity given to all by Christ.

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## **Strong in the Lord: the Spirituality of Blessed Alphonsa**

Unknown except to a few, having done nothing significant, being without any high educational degrees or official positions, leaving this world at the early age of thirty six after spending the greater part of her life on the sickbed, Blessed Alphonsa shines today as an inner spirit of the Kerala Church, a pillar of pride to this land of the Rishis, and an object of veneration for the whole world. Hundreds of thousands of all races and castes flock to her tomb at Bharanamganam and praying there they receive grace and comfort. Divine favours received through her are innumerable and exceptional. To know how this virgin who lived almost an unknown life was able to attain to such a high position and attract hundreds of thousands, we have to delve into the mystery of her inner life and the special qualities of her personality.

When Annakutty, the good natured and lovely girl of the Muttathupadathu family of Kudamaloor in the Changanacherry diocese took a firm decision to dedicate her whole life to the Lord and to live as his own, it was a big event. Shattering all obstacles, difficulties and oppositions and passing as if through an ordeal by fire she reached the portals of the convent. There she realized that one who desired to be a spouse of the poor and crucified Christ had to leave everything, walk the way of the Cross, bearing the torch of love and ascend the altar of sacrifice, and she courageously prepared herself for it. Though the small boat of her life was battered and tossed about by the whirlwind of sickness, sufferings, problems and

difficulties, trusting firmly in Jesus who was at the stern, she fearlessly rowed ahead. In a short time that boat reached the shores of eternity. The spouse of virgins clothed his faithful servant with his golden garment of sanctity and led her with the music of angels into the heavenly bridal chamber. The universal church has solemnly declared that truth and crowned her with a golden diadem of Blessedhood. A study of the different dimensions of her strong personality can be of great help for us in our God-ward journey.

### The flame of love

"One who has a loving heart has received a great treasure. To become a saint it is enough to know how to regulate the affections of the heart." This opinion of St. John of the Cross has been fully realized in Blessed Alphonsa. Born on 10th August 1910 to Joseph and Mary of Muttathupadathu Annakutty lost her mother soon after her birth and was brought up under the care of her maternal aunt Anamma. In the loving atmosphere of a Christian family deeply imbued with the spirit of faith and prayer Anna-kutty (who later received the name of Alphonsa in religion) had a heart brimming with love. She loved all who came in contact with her deeply and sincerely. But she had to engage in a hard struggle against herself to raise to the supernatural level her natural desire to love and be loved, and at the same time strengthen it. When she experienced the incomparable and indescribable sweetness of God's love, she realized the triviality and transitoriness of human love. So she assiduously strove to give her heart completely to Jesus Christ and to drink as best as she could from that divine fountain of love and communicate the same to others.

There was none in Blessed Alphonsa's community that did not experience the sweet fruits of her love. She deliberately tried to demonstrate a more hearty and loving affection towards those who showed towards her any kind of displeasure, opposition or aversion. By a loving word, a sweet smile, a timely help or a small gift she always brought

them into the ambience of her affection. She did not show any hesitation in giving away to others even those things that were quite necessary to her as a sickly individual. Alphonsa's constant thought was how to help and console her sisters in their needs, diseases and sorrows. She never forgot to offer them all to the Lord and pray for them in the presence of the Eucharist. She was willing to take over the sicknesses and pains of those who had other offices and duties since she was already bedridden and was unable to do anything else. She even prayed for it as a favour. Such was the example of her fervent self-sacrificing love for others. She realized deeply that it is impossible to love God whom we do not see without loving our brothers and sisters whom we see and expressing that love in real deeds. She had learned the poet's saying that the greatness of man consists in ennobling his life by making himself useful to other lives and ennobling others.

### On the altar of suffering

If we examine the life of Blessed Alphonsa we can see that from beginning to end it was filled with pain, suffering and crosses. Since she lost her mother immediately after she was born, she never experienced the maternal tenderness. Brought up under the care of her aunt who was a strict disciplinarian, she was denied the innocent pleasures and enjoyments of other children. She did not have the freedom to say a single word against the wishes and opinions of her aunt. Still in one thing alone Alphonsa did not yield to her aunt's will: As the résumé of her life in the beatification ceremony states: "At the age of thirteen, following local customs she was promised in marriage by her own family, while she herself had already felt the great desire to become a religious; finding no other way out of the difficult position she was in, the young girl thought of disfiguring a little her more than noteworthy beauty: she had read more than once that even the saints did the same. One morning, after a long period of prayer she approached a burning crater, she suddenly slipped and fell in, receiving very serious burns. Cured, she sought and obtained permission to enter the Clarist tertiaries of Mala-

bar: It was the feast of Pentecost 1927. Annakutty was only seventeen years of age." What she thus embraced was a life of suffering.

From the initial stage of religious life she was accompanied by all kinds of sicknesses and sufferings. Her sicknesses were so numerous that in the official document of her beatification it is reported that her illnesses provided enough material for a whole treatise on pathology. Alphonsa who became sickly, weak and bedridden so early in life had no worries or complaints about it. She cheerfully suffered the pains of her sickness and all the accompanying inconveniences and miseries without any complaints or remonstrations of any kind against any one. To those who approached her with words of sympathy her only request was: "Please pray that I may have the strength to bear joyfully the crosses given lovingly by Jesus." She knew that it was not possible to wear the crown of glory without undergoing sufferings and bearing the crosses. She surrendered herself in order that the will of God might be fully realized in her, and endeavoured sincerely to make her own the words of the Apostle: "Now not I, but Christ lives in me."

Blessed Alphonsa who immolated her life on the altar of suffering desired that others should not know its intensity. She used to have fits that were unbearable even to those who saw her suffer. She wished they occurred only during night and prayed that unknown to others and without receiving their help she could suffer alone with the Lord. Only those who experienced the sweetness of Christ's cross could have such an outlook on suffering. She thought that all the medical care and nursing she received were much more than what she deserved. She says: "So much of attention and care is not proper for me. What did the divine Spouse get when he was hanging on three nails? Abuse, bitter juice for his thirst and the cross for a pillow. I recline on a soft pillow. Sisters struggle to lessen my difficulties with consoling words and loving attention. I do not deserve such special attention."

### Apostle of prayer

We may say that Blessed Alphonsa's whole life was a prayer. She constantly lived with Christ, the Lord of her soul, for Him and in Him. Her deep prayer and unshaken confidence enabled her to follow the crucified on the narrow path with the flame of love. Christ the Lord was not in her view unknowable, unapproachable or unreachable. She spoke to him with a freedom as with a loving and intimate friend. Jesus filled her eyes, ears and lips. So she was able to communicate to all who approached her the love, compassion and peace of Jesus.

The principal apostolate of Blessed Alphonsa was prayer. She thought it her duty and privilege to pray for all in the presence of God. Seeing that she could not engage in any other apostolic activities she undertook upon herself the apostolate of prayer. In the needs and sufferings of others without their asking she prayed especially for them. The effect of her prayer was miraculous. The belief that anything could be obtained if Sister Alphonsa prayed for it spread among the people, and from far and wide many came asking for her prayers. She approached the Eucharistic Lord with a loving freedom: "My loving Lord, you have promised the reward to those who left all things for your sake. You know that I renounced for you all that I have and my own will. I fulfil your will always. There is a reward for suffering for you. So you must grant me this request, and I shall leave only after obtaining it..." Such was her prayer. In response to that innocence, selflessness and fraternal charity Jesus our Lord granted a shower of divine favours. But she did not pray for the removal of her own sufferings or sicknesses. Her only desire was that the will of God be fully realized in her.

### Vessel of innocence

Blessed Alphonsa trod the path of spiritual childhood taught by our Lord, and bore witness to it to the world like Little Theresa of Lisieux. Innocent heart, cheerful face, guileless look, speech full of simplicity, pleasing behaviour and a nature full of affection were her characteristics.

Children loved to flock around her since she was always smiling and made them happy with little presents. She taught them how to pray, how to practise self-denial and fraternal charity in a language easily understood by them and a style pleasing to them and they vied with one another in fulfilling what she instructed them to do. Those children understood that she was an extraordinary person and they were the ones who ignoring prohibitions and disapprovals lit candles at her tomb and first gave publicity regarding her sanctity.

### Humble maid of the Lord

Blessed Alphonsa was a humble handmaid of the Lord who stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans, brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly and revealed his mysteries to the little ones hiding them from the intelligent and the wise. She firmly believed that she was nothing, that she had no merits of her own, and declared so openly. Her only desire was to lead a hidden life. She used to tell her sisters: "The green leaves of ordinary plants form manure for roses by which the rose plant grows and flowers and people see and enjoy them. But who thinks of those poor leaves at the bed of the roses? For us also it is enough to become such hidden manure."

Though many persuaded her to write her autobiography she never agreed to it. Moreover the few notes she wrote about her inner life and experience of God she begged her superiors to destroy and made them accede to her wishes. She never desired to capture the attention of others or to create in them the impression that she had in herself anything special. Here is a prayer that gives some insights into her spirituality:

"O Lord Jesus, hide me in the wound of your heart. Free me from the desire to be loved and to be esteemed. Save me from the evil attempt to gain prestige and honour. Humiliate me till I become an atom and a spark in the flame of the fire of love in your heart. Give me the grace to forget all creatures

and myself. My Jesus, ineffable sweetness, change all worldly consolations into bitterness for me. My Jesus, sun of justice, illumine my mind with your divine ray, enlighten my intellect, purify my heart, burn me in love towards you and unite me to yourself'.

### A happy and satisfied Franciscan virgin

Blessed Alphonsa fully realized in her life the Franciscan ideal of bearing witness to an evangelical life, simple, innocent, full of self-sacrifice and filled with love. Detached from everything that is worldly, finding salvation in the cross of Christ, considering suffering for him alone the great grace, she surrendered everything in Jesus and lived that total surrender. So she was always happy and satisfied. Sickness or suffering, neglect or insult, crises or difficulties or anything else did not at all diminish her happiness or distance her from Jesus. This Franciscan virgin sowed love where there was hatred, patience where there was injury, joy where there was sadness, but took care to console than to be consoled, to love than to be loved and to give than to receive.

She endeavoured to the best of her ability to bring into herself and to present in her daily life that divine and inimitable personality who shines forth through the pages of the Gospels. That grain of wheat that fell into the fertile soil of suffering decayed, attained new life and produced fruits a hundred fold. She proved that if one followed the Good Shepherd who calls us to green pastures and leads us by hand, one will want nothing but will find easily the final glory of life.

### The significance of Blessed Alphonsa

The exaggerated narratives and descriptions concerning the saints of ancient days helped to create an impression that saints are all extraordinary people. But that a girl who was born in our land, grew up in circumstances similar to our own and remained an ordinary person in the eyes of the world was able to attain to a high position

of holiness is highly encouraging to us all. That Pope John Paul II officially proclaimed that our beloved sister who led the ordinary life in an extraordinary way rose to the heights of sanctity is a matter of pride for all of us.

On the other hand, she is the symbol and expression of the holiness of the local church and community to which she belonged. As Pope John Paul II pointed out in his homily Blessed Alphonsa shared by her sufferings the same Church's apostolate as Father Kuriakos Elias and "would gladly have served the Lord with similar apostolic projects. And indeed she possessed a personal devotion to Father Kuriakos from early in her religious life". Her experiences were closely linked to those of the community. Indeed, the Pope reminds us "how she experienced not only physical pain of great intensity, but also the spiritual suffering of being misunderstood and misjudged by others". Her holiness bears the stamp of a collective witness of the Kerala ecclesial community feeling together, working together, suffering and praying together.

Eliseus

## Sri Ramakrishna's Spiritual Message

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was born on the 20th of February 1833 in the village of Kamarpukur close to Calcutta and he passed away on August 16, 1886. So this year marks the centenary of a great Holy Man of our land. This article will summarise his spiritual message.

After testing the veracity of the various religious ideologies and concepts by experimentations following the path fixed for each Sri Ramakrishna has declared that Truth is one and that the so called religions and their sects are only different paths leading to that one and the same Truth. He says: "As one and the same material viz. water is called by different names by different people — one calling it 'water', another 'vari', a third 'aqua' and another 'pani' — so the one Sat-Cit-Ananda, the Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss, is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari, and by others as Brahman. Many are the names of God, and infinite the forms that lead us to know Him. In whatsoever name or form you desire to call Him, in that very form and name you will see Him. According to him realization of this Truth (God) is the only aim of human life. Without realization of God life is incomplete and unfulfilled. After God-realization nothing more remains to be attained here or hereafter.

Sri Ramakrishna declares that henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions and everyone down to the chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The message of Divine Love has to reach the doors of all, especially those of the millions of the lowly and the lost. The world is full of such souls bogged down in worldly mire and oblivious of the divinity within them. Sri Ramakrishna tells

them that the grace of the Lord is theirs also as it is of the men of renunciation. In fact, he says that blessed are those who perform their duties in the world and at the same time cherish love for the lotus feet of God. He gives simple methods for aspirants for developing love of God, methods which he himself had tried and found fruitful. Some salient features of these are presented here.

### **Do spiritual practices**

To realise God (Atman) which is the supreme purpose of life, one has to fortify his life with love of God. Spiritual discipline is needed for it. Longing is the means of realizing Atman. One should strive to attain God with all one's body, all one's mind and all one's speech. By thinking day and night of God one attains the nature of God. Spiritual life for Ramakrishna consisted in developing a passionate attachment to God and constantly desiring to see Him. Ramakrishna uses simple analogies from life to prove his point. It will not do simply to say that milk contains butter. You must let the milk set into curd and then churn it. Only then you get butter from it. You will not get a fish sitting by the side of a pond and repeating 'fish', 'fish'. First make arrangements for catching it. Throw spiced bait into water. Get a line and a rod. At the smell of the bait the fish will come from the deep water and then you can catch it. So one cannot see God merely by repeating 'God exists'; one needs *sadhana*.

### **Go into solitude**

Sri Ramakrishna points out that we cannot engage in spiritual disciplines adequately while living in the householder's surroundings. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities and hence the need to go into solitude now and then to think of God. This may be done whenever possible, for a day or two, three days, twelve days, one month, three months or a year according to one's convenience and ability; in solitude we establish an intimate relationship with the Lord. He becomes our own and we

His. One can feel His love and grace flowing into one's interior. Ramakrishna's constant advise was to pray to the Lord, meditate on Him, talk to him. Weep for Him with a yearning heart. Where else can you do these ? The mind is a needle covered with mud and God is the magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud which is nothing but lust, anger, greed and other evil tendencies and the inclination to worldly enjoyments also. As soon as the mud is washed away the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, you realise God. While practising discipline in solitude one has to think: "There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for a few days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realise Him?" One must also pray to Him with sincerity and longing and with tears for knowledge, devotion, discrimination, renunciation, detachment, yearning and all that is needed to reach Him while living in this world and also request Him to lead one by hand in the right path.

### **Company of holy men**

Ramakrishna showed by his own life-example as well as by constant exhortation that the company of holy men is essential for attaining holiness. He was greatly helped by the counsel of holy men like Tota-puri, under whose guidance Sri Ramakrishna reached very deep God-realization in three days, which the Master had taken forty years to acquire. The disease of worldliness (*bhaalaroga*) which becomes chronic can be mitigated to a great extent in holy company. So Ramakrishna says: "It is true that God is even in the tiger, but we must not go and face the animal. So it is true that God dwells even in the most wicked; but it is not meet that we should associate with the wicked. The manifestation of the Divinity must be understood to be in greater degree in those who are honoured, respected, and obeyed by a large following, than in those who have gained no such influence. *Satsanga* is the company of holy men and devotees of God who sing the glories of God. A brass pot must be polished everyday as

otherwise it gets tarnished. Similarly one should constantly live in the company of holy men to keep the mind fixed on God and free from the dirt of the world. One gradually acquires love of God through the practice of chanting God's name and glories and one should not be ashamed of chanting God's holy name. For Ramakrishna attainment of God-realization was not anything private but common endeavour of all human beings.

Prayer helps us considerably in our way towards God-realization. Pray in solitude. Pray to him with a yearning heart and tears in your eyes. Do not pray for worldly things. Sri Ramakrishna had a very tender way of addressing God: "O Lord, I throw myself on Thy mercy. I take shelter at Thy hallowed feet. I do not want bodily comforts. I do not crave for name and fame. I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends, a love craved by the devotees for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Lord, that I may not be deluded by thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold' conjured up by thy inscrutable maya. O Lord, there is no one but Thee whom I may call my own. Lord, I do not know how to worship, I am without austerity, I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious Lord and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet."

*Japa* is repeating the name of God. This has to be done with mental intensity and in solitude. When one chants His name with single minded devotion he becomes absorbed in Him, he sees His form and realizes Him. According to Ramakrishna *japa* is superior to worship, and meditation superior to *japa*. In meditation the mind becomes like a continuous flow of oil, without break, thinking of one object only and that is God. In meditation one has to fix one's mind on that form of the Lord which appeals to one most. Meditation can be on the formless aspect also if that suits one. When meditation becomes deep, gradually the sense organs stop functioning and the sense objects do

not bother any more; the mind does not look forward. It is like closing the gate of the outer court of a house leaving the sense objects outside. The sadhaka (seeker) sees nothing, hears nothing. He will not be conscious even of touch. Perfection in meditation is *samadhi*. *Japa* and meditation have to be done regularly at fixed hours.

### **Discrimination, renunciation, non-attachment and yearning for God**

Sri Ramakrishna is one who by a slow process of discernment and renunciation reached the state of true *annyasin*. An aspirant has to live in the world unattached to the worldly things. Discrimination and renunciation are needed for it. Discrimination is the knowledge that God alone is eternal or real and all else are impermanent or unreal. What can money get? Food, clothes, dwelling place and sense enjoyments. You cannot realize God with it. So money cannot be the goal of life. So also such things as creature comforts, name, fame and wealth. Why should you forget God for such things? This is the process of discrimination. When the spirit of discrimination is awakened the only desire is to know God.

Renunciation is dispassion for things unreal. This cannot be attained all of a sudden. It is not possible for a householder to give up everything for the sake of God. Renunciation has to start mentally seeing its reasonableness. Why renounce the world? It is advantageous to be a householder. It is like fighting from a fort. There are many disadvantages in fighting in an open field. Constantly learning about renunciation the desire for worldly objects gradually wears away. Renunciation becomes strong only if desires for worldly things are given up and longing for God grows.

Cultivate the spirit of detachment. Sri Ramakrishna did not ask all to leave the world. He asked of all a life of detachment, also of householders. One has always to keep one's mind on God. Know for certain that house, family and property are not yours. They are God's. Your real

home is in the Lord. All the worship and spiritual disciplines that you do will help you to get rid of the worldly attachments. The more you meditate on God the less you will be attached to the trifling things of the world. The more you love God the less you will crave the things of the world or pay heed to creature comforts. You will get rid of your bestial desires and acquire godly qualities. You will be totally unattached to the world. You become a *Jivanmukta*. This is the gist of Ramakrishna's message to people with worldly desires.

Another requisite for God-attainment is a constant yearning for Him. An intense restlessness is needed. The whole mind goes to God. It brings God-intoxication. Sri Ramakrishna compares this desire to a Child's yearning for its mother. The child has nothing but confusion when its mother is away. You cannot cajole it with sweetmeats and all. It only says, 'No, I want to go to my mother'. What yearning ! how restless ! Nothing can make it forget its mother. He to whom the enjoyment of worldly happiness appears tasteless, he who takes no delight in anything of the world like money, name, creature comforts and sensual pleasures and becomes sincerely grief-stricken for the vision of God, to him the Lord comes running.

### **Efface ego and surrender to God**

Denial of selfishness and the effacement of ego form a necessary requisite for God realization according to Sri Ramakrishna. The feeling of I and mine is ignorance. It is of the nature of *tamas* and is begotten by ignorance. On account of the barrier of this ego one does not see God. There can be no liberation so long as the ego remains. One can get rid of ego not by reasoning but by surrendering oneself to God. One has to surrender oneself. "O Lord, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant and devotee. I do as Thou dost through me. I am the machine and Thou art the operator." God has put you in the world. What can you do about it? Resign everything to Him. Then you realize that it is God who does everything. There will be no confusion. Create a roseate intoxication in your

mind with the thought of God. You will be doing your duties but let that pleasant intoxication remain with you.

### Go forward

By sustained spiritual efforts in the chosen path, the seeker progresses in his path to realization passing through different stages. The first stage is that of the beginner. He studies and hears. Second is the stage of the struggling aspirant. He prays to God, meditates on Him and sings His glories and name. The third stage is that of a perfect soul. He has seen God, realized Him directly and immediately in his inner consciousness. Last is the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of supremely perfect, like Chaitanya. Such a devotee establishes a definite relationship with God, looking on Him as his son or beloved.

Sri Ramakrishna's life itself was a spiritual message. He did not go preaching, people flocked to him seeking his *darsan* and advice. "When the rose is blown and sheds its fragrance all around, the bees come of themselves. The bees seek the full blown rose, and not rose the bees." These words the Paramahamsa exemplified in his own life.

M. R. Gopalakrishnan Nair

## Sri Narayana Guru and his Advaitic Vision

Sri Narayana Guru was a great yogi who followed the way of life of Sri Buddha, Sri Sankara, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Jesus Christ and Mohammed Nabi. He got the advaitic realization through *bhakti-yogic sādhana* and knowledge. He applied the great advaitic principles for the benefit of the common people. Sri Rabindranath Tagore characterised Sri Narayana Guru as the greatest of the spiritual persons and maharshis whom he had ever met. Romain Roland called him a "Jnanin in action, a grand religious intellectual, who had a living sense of the people and of social necessities". Mahatma Gandhi greatly admired his holiness and accepted his advice in his Harijan uplift activities.

Sri Narayana Guru was born in 1856 at Chembazanthi near Trivandrum, son of Madan Ashan, a teacher and a physician. Early in life he evinced an inborn sympathy for the poor and the down-trodden. In spite of the disadvantages he had as an Ezhava he gained a solid knowledge of Sanskrit and showed a preference for a life of penance and solitude. After spending several years as a solitary in hills and caves he started out as a mendicant easily mingling with Muslims, Christians, Nairs and low castes sharing their meals. But his main goal was to improve the condition of his fellow Ezhavas and to unite them on a solid religious basis of one human race and one God of all. His life message was: "One caste, one religion, one God for man." He was a Vedantin with the yogic experience of the Supreme Identity "in which oppo-

sitions and all contrarieties even of being and non-being are resolved".

### The theory of one caste

The specific contribution of Sri Narayananaguru to Advaita Philosophy and Religion is the theory of one caste, one God, one religion to humanity. Like the Buddha, the Guru fondly proclaimed the theory of one caste and justified it through his dedicated services to humanity. All matter is one, spirit is also one. As there is no differences from the stand-point of matter and spirit, there is no basis for any caste system. "After the Buddhist period the strictly neutral position of wisdom relative to social matters was violated and the necessary aspects of social obligations were stressed by way of a reaction against the 'heterodoxy' implied in Buddhism... In reviewing the whole matter critically, Guru Narayana brings in characteristics of reality hitherto uncritically treated, within the full scrutiny of contemplative criticism<sup>1</sup>. After attaining the state of *jivanmukta*, the Guru also followed the ideals of the Buddha and Sri Sankara and dedicated his life to the well-being of humanity. He proclaims the theory of one caste, one religion, one God for mankind on the basis of the Advaitic vision in 'A Critique of Caste' (*Jatimimamsa*). He says:

Man's humanity marks out the human-kind  
 Even as bovinity proclaims a cow  
 Brahminhood and such are not thus-wise;  
 None does see this truth, alas!<sup>2</sup>  
 One of kind, one of faith, and one in God is man;  
 Of one womb, of one form; difference herein none.<sup>3</sup>  
 Within a species, is it not, that offspring truly breed?  
 The community of men thus viewed, to a single caste  
 belongs.<sup>4</sup>

1. W. G., p. 274

2. A Critique of Caste, Sl. 1, W.G., p. 273

3. Ibid., Sl. 2

4. Ibid., Sl.3, W.G., p. 273

Of the human species is even a Brahmin born, as is  
the Pariah too,

Where is difference then in caste as between man  
and man?<sup>5</sup>

The Guru reveals the Upanisadic vision that service  
of humanity is service of the Self, i.e., God; He says:

What here we view as this man or that

Reflection reveals to be the Self's prime form;

That conduct adopted for one's Self-happiness

Another's happiness must also secure at once.<sup>6</sup>

Apparent duality exists in Atman. So according to  
the Guru the knower of this Advaitic truth will perform  
action for self-happiness, such as shall be the cause  
for the happiness of others also. Sankara says that the  
Yogi sees that whatever is pleasant to himself is pleasant  
to all creatures, and that whatever is painful to himself is  
painful to all other beings. Thus seeing that what is pleasure  
or pain to himself is alike pleasure or pain to all other  
beings, he causes pain to no being; he is harmless. Doing  
no harm, and devoted to right knowledge, he is regarded  
as the highest among all yogins<sup>7</sup>, for, God lives in the hearts  
of all creatures<sup>8</sup>. "The duality that is apparent between  
the interests of two individuals can be viewed unitively as  
referring to the self-same central or neutral Self conceived  
in the context of the Absolute."<sup>9</sup> The Guru says that Atman  
is one only without a second, and that māyā alone is the  
cause of the universe.

The great Advaitic teachers do not accept any dis-  
tinction of caste in humanity. According to Advaita Philo-  
sophy, the caste-distinctions have no basis. The Guru's  
teachings on the theory of one-caste are found in a nut-  
shell form, in the collection of his short poems, *Jāti-*

5. Ibid.. Sl. 4

6. A. Sa. Sl 24, p. 115

7. B.G.B., VI, 32

8. Isvarah sarvabhanam lrdcse arjuna tistati, B.C., XVIII, G1.

9. A. Sa., p. 115

*mīmāṃsā*. He says that Brahminhood and Pariahhood as such have no reality. Sri Sankara also had declared the one-caste theory in his *Bhaṣyas* on the basis of *Advaita*.

### The views of Sri Sankara and the Guru on caste

Scholars say that Sri Sankara was in favour of the one-caste system. Advaitins see the oneness in all being. Sri Sankara was a great Advaita teacher who himself sees the non-duality in all beings. So like him the Guru could not have approved of any difference or caste system based on birth. He expresses the following views in his commentary of the *Gita*<sup>10</sup>: "The four *Varnas*, which mean colours, have been created by Me, *Iṣvara*, according to the distribution of energies (*guṇas*) and of action. The energies are (*Sattva*) goodness, (*Rajas*) anger, pride, activity and (*Tamas*) darkness. The actions of a Brahmana (Priest), in whom *Sattva* predominates are marked by serenity, self-restraint, austerity etc. (See *Gitā* XVIII, 42) The actions of a *Kṣatriya* (warrior), in whom *Rajas* predominates which is subordinate to *Sattva* are commercial, agricultural etc. (See *Gita* XVIII 44). The action of a *Sudra* (servant) in whom *Tamas* predominates which is subordinate to *Rajas*, is only servitude. Thus have been created the four *Varnas* according to the distribution of energies (*gunas*) and actions<sup>11</sup>. *Varna* is not caste, for, it is not determined by birth. The idea that caste is determined by birth is entirely different from the concept of *Varna*. The caste system was created by the selfish, the ignorant and the fanatic among the people of India.

Sri Narayana Guru accepted the theory of one caste for the humanity as a whole on the basis of Advaitic and Vedic tradition itself. Thus the Guru taught the principle of the service of humanity as service of God.

Sri Sankara made an Advaitic affirmation of his faith

10. B.G., IV, 13

11. B.G.B., IV, 13

in Varanasi and accepted the theory of one caste, in addition to the doctrine of one religion based on one God.

### The aim of the universal religion

The Guru says that God is Bliss, i.e., Consciousness. There is nothing negative about the concept of *Nirguna-Brahman*. What is asserted here is that there is no reality apart from Brahman. Brahman is described as 'the Real of the real'.<sup>12</sup> It is also defined as the plentitude which remains unaffected in its infinitude even if anything were taken out. The religion of the Guru tolerates all forms of worship as alternative approaches to Reality. It shows tolerance and a catholic outlook and provides fellowship of faiths and inter-religious unity. It is the concept of the final goal of *Nirvana* or *Nirguna-Brahman* that has made Sri Narayana Guru the interpreter of Advaita Philosophy and religion. As the great harmoniser of all religions he practised and taught the Advaita way of life, i.e., one religion.

The philosophy and religion of the Buddha and Sri Sankara gave inspiration to the philosophy and religion of the Guru. But he was a harmoniser of all religions in the world based on one God without any iota of any caste system, for, religion is the realisation of Bliss.

### The theory of one God of the guru

According to the Guru the service of humanity is the service of God. So the Guru sees that God alone exists and He presides over all actions. He stresses the point that people should dedicate their lives for the service of God who lives in the heart of man. Thus Bliss, i.e., the welfare and release of humanity, is the goal of his philosophy and religious Advaitic Philosophy of God alone encourages man to love God 'without a medium of veil' as He is set forth in it as his veritable Self, and as the ineluctable leader of his empirical self to its ineffable state as the absolute. Thus, it may be concluded that according

to Advaita 'God it is who drives the *jiva* through all levels of reality to the ultimate Reality'<sup>13</sup>. And that God-realisation is the *raison d'être* of man and the world<sup>14</sup>. Even though the essence of all the selves is only One Ultimate Reality without a second, each self has to be dedicated for the realisation of his own true nature, i.e., Brahman, the Ultimate Truth, God. The worship of God or the service of humanity leads to the realisation of God. In this connection we may remember the prayer of the Guru that teaches that non-dual truth can be attained by the grace of God.

Sri Narayana Guru, who attained the final release or *Nirvana*, says that Brahman is *Saccidānanda*. He declares that there is no doubt about this Ultimate Truth. Brahman is *Sat* or *Sat* is Brahman, i.e., *Atman*. Sri Sankara also says that *anatman* is *asat*<sup>15</sup>. The One God theory of the Guru is acceptable, for, the nature of God, i.e., *Sat* is realised through perception also. Thus truth is illustrated by the author of the *Tattvasuddhi* as follows: Perception apprehends neither pot, cloth nor their reality, but bare reality, which is constant in a pot, cloth etc. as their substratum. Perception, too, is favourable to the establishment of non-dual Truth as the nature of Reality<sup>16</sup>. The experience in the world also supports the Advaitic theory of One God as *Saccidananda*. The pot is existence (*Sat*), the pot is shining (*Cit*), the pot is dear (*Ananda*) to me; thus the three forms (*Brahmarūpa*) are of the nature of God i.e., Brahman. The name and form both exist in the pot. The superimposed name and form of the world are *Sat* which is Brahman. According to the Guru *Saccidananda* is the definition of God or Brahman, in the Advaita Vedanta.

To him universal religion accepts universal truth, i.e., One God based on the Advaitic vision. He describes that this is *Saccidananda*: Reality, Consciousness and Bliss.

13. The Brahmasutra, p. 126

14. G.A., p. 223

15. S.B. on B.G. II. 16

16. Siddhanta-Lesa Samgrah, p. 49

Brahman is one; its constitution is defined and interpreted. Brahman (God) is not unreality, ignorance or sorrow. Brahman, that is Existence, Brahman that is Consciousness, Brahman that is Bliss. The qualities are not distinct from Brahman. They are his *svarūpa* (intrinsic nature). It is in the same sense that the attributes — Existence, Consciousness and Bliss — have to be realised as *Saccidananda*. It indicates the concept of One God in Advaita negating non-existence, non-sentience and sorrow. The theory of One God is a truth to the whole humanity.

### Conclusion

"Glaserapp does not say anything regarding new religious manifestations in South India which are not negligible; such for example is the great Guru, Sri Narayana, whose beneficent spiritual activity has been exercising its influence during the past forty years in the State of Travancore on nearly two millions of his followers. He passed away in 1928. His teaching, permeated with the philosophy of Sankara, shows evidence of a striking difference of temperament compared with the mysticism of Bengal, of which the effusions of love (*bhakti*) created in him a certain mistrust. He was, one might say, a *Jnanin* of action, a grand religious intellectual who had a keen living sense of the people and of social necessities. He has contributed greatly to the elevation of the oppressed classes in South India and his work has been associated at certain times with that of Gandhi." This was the evaluation given by Romain Rolland about the place of Sri Narayananaguru in the India of today.

His special contribution is the concept of One God, on the practical side for the establishment of the concept of the non-dual *Brahman-Atman* in Advaita: Brahman's appearance as the world is strictly not a transfiguration (*parināma*) but just figuration (*vivarta*) only, for it is the formless appearance as it were in forms. But the *Nyaya-vaiśeṣikas* accept the plurality of Atman which is not consciousness. According to them, cognition is only an attri-

bute of the Atman. But the *Sankhyas* refute this view and identify the Atman with consciousness. In expressing this opinion they are at one with the view of the Guru. But the *Sankhyas* and others believe in the plurality of *puruṣas* or souls, unlike the Advaitins. The *prakṛti* concept of the *Sankhyas* has developed into the concept of *Maya* or illusion which is the cause of the apparent phenomena in the walking dream and deep sleep states. The *Nyaya-Vaiśeṣikas* and the yoga schools accept the reality of *Isvara*. The Guru asserts that even *Isvara* is not the Ultimate Reality but only 'Saguna-Brahman, which is essential and useful to the devotees' in the realm of *maya*. The *purva-Mimamsakas* acknowledge only the plurality of the Atman and emphasise the *karma* (action) theory and enjoyment in the other world but not the concept of *Isvara*. The *Jainas* and materialists (*Carvakas*) recognise the plurality of *Jivas* and their identity with consciousness. The materialists do not accept the ultimate Reality of the soul but they try to follow the great messages of the Guru. If they understand the spirit of Advaitic theory of religion, they can do better services for the well-being of humanity.

The great merit of Sri Narayana Guru is that he translated his religious vision into action to effect a radical social change among the people. In 1903 he founded the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam or S.N.D.P. for the dissemination of the ideals of Sree Narayana Dharma among the masses. He was able to inspire a great many talented people like T.K. Madhavan, a Hindu, C.V. Kunjuraman, a rationalist agnostic, Sahodaran Ayyappan and C. Krishnan, a Buddhist, all to work together for the uplift of the down-trodden. But all through the social and political struggle Sri Narayana Guru maintained his religious perspective. "The aim of religion is to lift the thought of man to the summit", he said in a statement in the *Kerala Kaumudi*: "The Buddha did not attain the ultimate in enlightenment by studying Buddhism. He realized. He preached what he had realised. And those teachings became Buddhism. Jesus Christ never had any use for Christianity, did he? But the followers of the Buddha had to depend on Buddhism and

the followers of Christ needed Christianity. This is true of other religions too.

He passed away on 20th of September, 1928 at the age of 72. His ideal was that religion should confront life in all its aspects. All human-kind have to be responsive to true spiritual realization by living in amity, good fellowship, and love, free from all antagonism of race, nationality, creed or caste.

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